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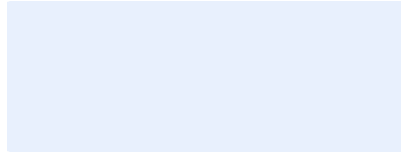
Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties

Annual Progress Report 2015-16

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:

https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/dfp-equality-and-section-75

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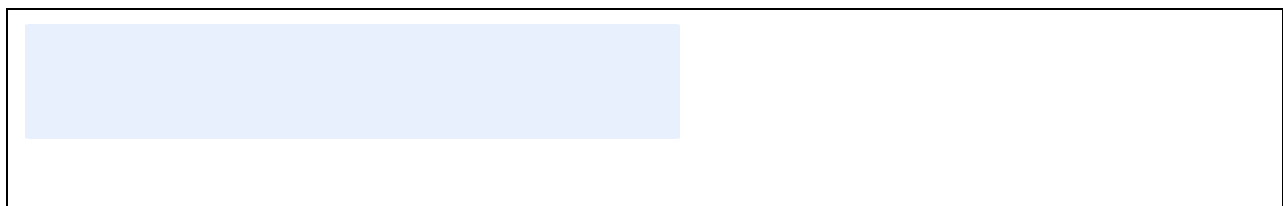
This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.

It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.

This report reflects progress made between April 2015 and March 2016

PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme

Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice

1   In 2015-16, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

The Department remains committed to its statutory duties and this report shows the progress we are continuing to make in implementing the equality and good relations duties. It also reflects the extent to which we continue to ensure that equality and good relations issues are mainstreamed into our policy-making processes. While the main functions of the Department are inward facing and primarily aimed at providing support services to the NICS, we endeavour to make a positive impact and promote equality and good relations where possible.

The Department is committed to equality of opportunity for all staff within the NICS. In October 2015 we appointed a Board level Diversity Champion to contribute to the NICS network of diversity champions. The purpose of this role is to ensure that Diversity is actively promoted by senior leaders across all aspects, including Gender, Black Ethnic Minority (BEM), Disability, and Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT).

The Department has established a Diversity Advisory Group whose remit is to raise awareness of Diversity within the Department of Finance, and identify opportunities for progress. The group has met on several occasions and has briefed the Departmental Board on priorities for Diversity, securing their endorsement of the Group's action plan. The group is now taking these forward through a number of initial actions. The primary focus has been on building awareness and increasing staff engagement and understanding at all levels. Key actions include communicating introductory articles such as 'What Diversity Means to Me'; hosting a 'Conversations with a Purpose' event on gender diversity; and planning a series of DoF staff focus groups on diversity which will take place in autumn 2016 with the aim of engaging staff on the role of Diversity in the 'NICS of the Future'.

Corporate HR has been working closely with the Diversity Champions Network, the DoF Diversity Advisory Group and the Rainbow Project to develop an NICS survey on LGBT issues which will issue later this year and will help inform future events and actions. The quarterly Corporate HR publication, Xpress HR, which is issued to all staff within the NICS, included an update on diversity in the Spring 2016 edition and a link to the NICS intranet diversity webpage. This webpage brings together a range of information, perspectives and policies on diversity issues.

In July 2015, the NICS officially launched a new policy statement on Equality, Diversity

and Inclusion. In order to provide a high-quality service, the NICS needs to attract, recruit, develop and retain the very best people at all levels. The new policy statement is based on three key principles:

Equality – we promote equality of opportunity by seeking to remove barriers, eliminating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunity and access for all groups of people.

Diversity – we accept each person as an individual. Our success is built on our ability to embrace diversity and we believe that everyone should feel valued for their contributions. By working together we will deliver the best possible service for our staff, customers and stakeholders.

Inclusion – we create a working culture where differences are not merely accepted, but valued; where everyone has the opportunity to develop in a way that is consistent with, and adheres to, NICS values of impartiality, honesty, integrity and objectivity. Our aim is to be an organisation where people feel involved, respected and connected to our success.

These principles of equality, diversity and inclusion will be reflected in the development or review of human resource policies, including the development of the NICS Marketing Strategy.

During the year the Department initiated and took forward changes to pensions which benefit a wide range of S75 categories. The proposal was made by the Department to remove the cessation for surviving widows/widowers in the event of future remarriage or cohabitation, and, to reinstate pensions to surviving widows/widowers who have remarried or cohabited with a new partner. Both elements came into effect from 1 April 2016. The proposal was also made by the Department to admit staff in the office of the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints to the NICS pension arrangements. The policy is beneficial to members as it provided employees with access to an occupational pension scheme.

Land and Property Services (LPS) is one of the largest areas within the Department and is the main public facing directorate. Detailed information on the services it provides is available through the Government's NI Direct and other websites. There are increasing demands for information through digital, web and telephony channels and LPS continues to work to deliver these. LPS is mindful of the barriers some Section 75 groups can face in accessing online information and there has been ongoing efforts and liaison with representative groups to ensure that all information is accessible, for example, tagging online literature (pdf format) to make it accessible to those with visual impairments. To date, all citizen-facing literature published on the NIDirect website has been tagged for accessibility. When placing classified advertising in the press, LPS follows Government Advertising Unit guidelines to ensure all sections of society are included.

When dealing with requests to the District Valuer for a review of the Valuation List or with appeals to the Commissioner of Valuation, valuers will always interview the applicant/appellant in their own property or other location (at their request) if that is

more convenient.

All customer literature within LPS includes a prominent line providing instructions on how to get the item in another language or format and during the 2015/16 year LPS provided one rates bill in braille format and two in the Irish Language.

Over the year, LPS Revenues and Benefits Directorate met or maintained communication with a number of external organisations i.e. Disability Action, Mencap, Sense, RNIP and Action on Hearing Loss to maintain good relations/communication and provide an opportunity for any issues, concerns or new practices to be discussed.

As part of the wider initiative to improve access to benefits, LPS continues to raise awareness of the Housing Benefit, Rate Relief, Disabled Person's Allowance and Lone Pensioner Allowance Schemes which are available to assist with the payment of Rates. LPS is continuing to work closely with the Independent Advisory Sector and community groups to increase awareness of available rate reliefs and encourage uptake across the province.

During the 2015/16 year, there were 1,212 new Disabled Person's Allowance (DPA) awards and 3,387 new Lone Pensioner Allowance (LPA) awards made. The number of individuals receiving LPA increased from 25,266 at the end of 2014/15 to 26,295 at the end of 2015/16.

LPS continued to share data with the Department for Communities and provide validation for Housing Benefit for rates, LPA and DPA claims made during DfC outreach exercises such as 'Make the Call'.

Another area of significant interaction with citizens is the NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). NISRA has recently been commissioned to take forward work to update the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010 (NIMDM 2010) with a view to publishing the results by mid-2017. Measures that describe the spatial distribution of deprivation or disadvantage have been developed and used by Government and others since the 1970s. They have played a pivotal role in both informing the targeting of resources to the most deprived areas and monitoring the spatial impact of policy interventions. During the last quarter of 2015/16, NISRA launched a consultation on Output Geography for Deprivation to consider the options for the geographical levels for which the Updated NIMDM 2017 will be produced and published.

During 2015/16, NISRA continued to update and promote the NINIS website www.nisra.gov.uk/ninis which provides free access to statistical and locational information relating to small areas across the Region. It currently hosts over 2,600 data sets across a range of themes including population, health, education, crime, census 2011 and deprivation. As a central source of quality-assured data, it can help to develop and monitor evidence-based policy.

Free NINIS training sessions were delivered to various users including researchers, students and local council officials. NISRA continued to work closely with NICVA and

seminars were held for the community and voluntary sector on the availability of statistics for the 11new councils and on *The Challenges for Northern Ireland of an Ageing Population*. These presentations were very well received and were delivered following the publication of the Registrar General's Annual Report in July 2015; this report included detailed demographic statistics for the Region as well as a special article on its ageing population.

NISRA also worked with OFMDFM to release Age-friendly Area Profiles on NINIS for each of the 11 councils on 1 October 2015 – see link to Belfast report as an example – select 'Age Friendly' tab. A new 'Making Life Better' section was added to the NINIS website as part of the work undertaken by NISRA for the Public Health Agency; this includes indicators for the Making Life Better strategic framework for Public Health. NISRA also continued to work with DSD on updating and promoting statistics and Area Profiles for Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

Digital Transformation Service (DTS) continued to deliver the Go ON NI programme with the aim of increasing the number of citizens who are able to access and use online services. This programme, in partnership with relevant charitable organisations and community groups, promotes digital services to the most disadvantaged groups, and provides assisted digital services.

During 2015/16, this programme delivered digital skills training for older people, with activities such as Silver Surfers Day and Get Online Weeks. DTS also worked in partnership with local charities such as the Cedar Foundation, Action Mental Health, MS Society, Stepping Stones, NOW and Orchardville Society to hold a series of training sessions for people with disabilities. Workshops have also been delivered by RNIB in partnership with Libraries NI. Using specialist equipment and facilities provided by the charities, participants were given one-to-one tuition in the use of the internet and specific online services including the NIDirect website.

IT support continues for a pilot project "Breezie – Bridging the Digital Divide" with the provision of specialist software for those in Sheltered Housing Accommodation and those with early onset dementia. A pilot project has commenced in partnership with Supporting Communities and the Heath Trusts to provide specific IT training for carers.

During the year, Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) revised *Procurement Guidance Note 01/13 – Integrating Social Considerations into Contracts* to align it with modernised procurement legislation – The Public Contracts Regulations 2015. This Note provides advice on how law and policy support the integration of social considerations into contracts and is applicable to those bodies covered by the Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy.

In the same period CPD, in consultation with the local construction industry, contributed to the development of a new Buy Social Construction Model. The Model, which was endorsed by the Procurement Board in November, provides targeted recruitment and training for long-term unemployed people and those leaving education in Government construction contracts. It applies to building contracts with a value above £2m and civil

engineering contracts with a value above £4m. The Model came into effect in April 2016 and CPD is applying it to appropriate construction projects. A Buy Social Model for services contracts is currently being developed and piloted.

CPD staff continued to provide professional advice and support to departments in relation to the incorporation of social considerations into their contracts.

Rating Policy Division undertook a screening exercise in relation to its supplementary consultation work regarding proposals for enhancing rate relief for Community Amateur Sports clubs. This task was assisted by a screening tool, developed internally for use by our policy unit to help assess the potential impacts of new policies as well as amendments to existing policies. It is based on official Northern Ireland Executive guidance.

DoF also issued a Code of Practice for Reducing Bureaucracy in Grant Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector in 15/16. The Code aims to reduce the burden of bureaucracy associated with grant funding to organisations in the voluntary and community sector. Its themes are collaboration, proportionality and timeliness. This was a cross-departmental project involving all departments and NICVA representing the voluntary and community sector. DoF were involved at both Project Team and Project Board level, as well as being one of four members of the Corporate Steering Group.

2   Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2015-16 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

Please see appended S75 action plan with progress/examples identified.

3   Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2015-16 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐   Yes   ☒   No (go to Q.4)   ☐   Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

Equality issues are examined at all stages of policy development and are mainstreamed in our work. When developing policies, equality of opportunity is firmly embedded in the process. As such, screening exercises have shown that the impacts are either positive, addressing existing inequalities or, when combined with existing policies, are already mitigated.

3a   With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

PART A

3b What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? *(tick all that apply)*

☐ As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy *(please give details):*

☐ As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise *(please give details):*

☐ As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact *(please give details):*

☐ As a result of changes to access to information and services *(please specify and give details)*:

☐ Other *(please specify and give details)*:

Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments <u>and</u> action plans/measures

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2015-16 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes, organisation wide

☒ Yes, some departments/jobs

☐ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment

☐ No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Personal performance agreements (similar to job descriptions) contain targets and objectives, which include statutory obligations relative to the official's responsibilities.

5   Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2015-16 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes, organisation wide

☒ Yes, some departments/jobs

☐ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment

☐ No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Plans, flowing out of the Department's business plan, were created for each business area, including relevant obligations for managers and staff in relation to Section 75 duties. The balanced scorecard for Corporate Services Division included an action to provide advice, guidance and support to policy makers on all aspects of equality.

In the 2015-16 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? *(tick all that apply)*

☐ Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan

☐ Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning

☒ Yes, in some departments/jobs

☐ No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan

☐ No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2015-16 report

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The Department's operational business plan for 2015/16 was a one-year stand-alone plan that drew on the 2011-15 Programme for Government commitments and the strategic objectives set in the 2012-15 Corporate Plan. A multi-year corporate plan will be developed in line with the next Programme for Government. Key work areas and job descriptions within DoF have specific links/references to the statutory duties.

Equality action plans/measures

7   Within the 2015-16 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:		Actions ongoing:	9	Actions to commence:	

Please provide any details and examples (*in addition to question 2*):

Please see attached action plan.

8   Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2015-16 reporting period *(points not identified in an appended plan)*:

Please see attached plan.

9   In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2015-16 reporting period, the following have been identified: *(tick all that apply)*

⊠   Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality

⊠   Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way

☐   Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities

☐   Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

10   Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: *(tick one box only)*

⊠   All the time   ☐   Sometimes   ☐   Never

11   Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2015-16 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

The Department did not have any policies that were screened in this year. However, we did take forward a number of pre-consultation exercises (e.g. on rating issues and Census 2021 outputs) to evaluate policy options and assess equality issues.

12   In the 2015-16 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which

consultation methods were **most frequently <u>used</u> by consultees**: *(tick all that apply)*

☒ Face to face meetings

☒ Focus groups

☒ Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing

☐ Questionnaires

☒ Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation

☐ Internet discussions

☐ Telephone consultations

☐ Other *(please specify)*:

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

The majority of consultees preferred to provide a written submission in response to consultation questions. Some informal inquiries and clarification did take place between the Department and consultees, but formal responses were normally submitted in writing.

13 Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2015-16 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The Department keeps in contact with consultees through the regular issuing of emails with details of screening assessments and consultations. We also undertook a review of our Equality Scheme during the year and issued this to our Equality Consultees for comment.

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2015-16 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable – no commitment to review

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/dfp-departmental-equality-scheme

15   Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year (*as recorded in screening reports*):

13

Details of policy screenings are circulated to our Equality Consultees and published on the departmental website.

16   Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2015-16:

2	Policy consultations conducted with **screening** assessment presented.
0	Policy consultations conducted **with an equality impact assessment** (EQIA) presented.
0	Consultations for an **EQIA** alone.

We also held a number of pre-consultation exercises to help inform our understanding of policy options and to allow consultees to highlight any issues which may impact on the Section 75 groups. All our consultations can be viewed on our website: https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/

17   Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

Consultation on Proposed Changes to Pre-2002 Civil Service Widows/Widowers Pension Arrangements.

This consultation set out the Department's proposed changes to pre-2002 Civil Service widows/widowers pension arrangements with effect from 1 April 2016. The Department proposed two key changes: to remove the cessation for surviving widows/widowers in the event of future remarriage or cohabitation, and, to reinstate pensions to surviving widows/widowers who have remarried or cohabited with a new partner. It was intended that both elements came into effect from 1 April 2016.

The Department welcomed responses from surviving widows/widowers who may be impacted by the current policy; civil service members of the 'classic' sections; civil service

and pensioner representative groups and civil service employers. The response to the consultation was published on 10 March 2016.

Consultation on Enhanced Sport and Recreation Relief for Unlicensed Community Amateur Sports Clubs

The Initial Integrated Impact Assessment for the targeted supplementary consultation on Community Amateur Sports Clubs included an Equality Screening Exercise which determined no impact.

18   Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes   ☐ No concerns were raised   ☒ No   ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

19   Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2015-16 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

20   From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2015-16 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes   ☒ No, already taken place

☐ No, scheduled to take place at a later date   ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details:

During the development of the Equality Scheme, the Department conducted a comprehensive audit of inequalities. Since then, a review of action plans has taken place each year with the aim of identifying any new inequalities which may have emerged.

21   In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes   ☒ No   ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

22   Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2015-16 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

N/A – ongoing monitoring of policies has not revealed any adverse impacts.

23   Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

While not directly a result of monitoring, NISRA has continued to improve the availability and quality of equality data e.g. Age-friendly Area Profiles on NINIS. See - http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

24   Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2015-16, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

Staff in the Department undertook the following training provided by the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL):

Disability Awareness for Frontline Staff (e-learning) – 4 staff
Diversity Now (classroom-based) – 32 staff
Diversity Now (e-learning) – 2412 staff
Dignity at Work Awareness – 541 staff
Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) workshop – 6 staff
Evaluating Policy – 6 staff
Introduction to Developing Policy – 11 staff
Introduction to Human Rights (e-learning) – 3 staff
Introduction to Section 75 (e-learning) – 1 staff
Policy Making and Human Rights – 3 staff
Public Consultation and Engagement – 2 staff
Recruitment and Selection – Legislation (e-learning) – 9 staff
Supporting Vulnerable People (e-learning) – 5 staff

CAL continually reviews and updates the training it offers, using course evaluation information and by keeping abreast of legislative developments and best practice. Evaluation feedback for the Diversity Now course showed an increase in participants' post-course knowledge and skills and the majority of participants indicated that their objectives had been met. New training was added to CAL's portfolio during the year – Supporting Vulnerable People (e-learning), Mental Health Awareness for Line Managers, and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Awareness (e-Learning) .

LPS continues to provide Deaf Awareness Training, training in the use of the EPI pen and in the safe use of evacuation chairs to appropriate staff. During the 2015/16 year, 14 staff undertook Deaf Awareness Training and 15 staff undertook EPI pen training.

LPS also continues to provide new staff within the application based Rate Relief team with specialist courses on Age Awareness, Working with Older People, and Introduction to Older People's benefits training as required.

25   Please provide any examples of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

Deaf Awareness training continues to be a useful asset within LPS – on several occasions over the 2015/16 year LPS Training & Development Unit were contacted by staff members seeking Deaf Awareness Training to assist in their work.

Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)

26   Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2015-16, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

In 2015-16 LPS for the first time published online Summary Valuation List data for each of the Council districts. This information is updated monthly and shows total NAV and Capital Values and the total value of reliefs and exemptions. Also in 2015-16, again for the first time, LPS published online Prime Rate per Square Metre for all 52,000 shops, offices, factories and warehouses. This information is updated every 6 months and is tagged for on-line accessibility.

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

27   How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2015-16?

Insert number here:

0

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

There have been no complaints received regarding Equality issues during the 2015-16 year. The following is an update in relation to the case mentioned in last year's report:

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland registered a Stage 1 complaint with Land & Property Services on behalf of an individual in November 2014. The Commission was unhappy with the initial reply and the matter was escalated to a Stage 2 complaint in December 2014.

Subsequent to this the Equality Commission served a civil bill on LPS and as a result the Stage 2 complaint was withdrawn from the LPS Complaints process. Following a letter from The Crown Solicitor's Office (CSO) in December 2015, the Equality Commission withdrew its support for the case.

Section 3: Looking Forward

28   Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

A consultation on the Department's (draft) revised Equality Scheme was carried out during 2015/16. The revised Scheme will be published later this year.

29   Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)*

We intend to undertake more communication activity with staff and provide appropriate training and support to ensure that equality and good relations issues continue to be mainstreamed into our policy-making processes. We will also place an increased emphasis on the process for screening policies.

30   In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next (2016-17) reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)*

☐ Employment

☐ Goods, facilities and services

☐ Legislative changes

☐ Organisational changes/ new functions

☒ Nothing specific, more of the same

☐ Other (please state):

Section 75 Action Plan: Progress against 2015-16 actions

Section 75 Category	Inequalities identified	action	measure	outcome	timescale	2015-2016 update
Religious Belief	Under-representation of Protestants in administrative and junior management grades in the NICS compared to the NI labour market. Under-representation of Protestants and Catholics in some grades in the Professional and Specialist groups in the NICS compared to the	Use of positive action advertising statements to encourage applications from under-represented groups.	Workforce equal opportunities monitoring and Review of Fair Participation in the NICS (the "Article 55 Review")	Reduction in degree of measured under-representation.	Ongoing.	The results of the 2013 Article 55 Review were published in May 2015. The review found continuing under-representation of Protestants in administrative and junior management grades compared to the NI labour market. The review found continuing under-representation of Protestants and Roman Catholics in some grades in the

	NI labour market.					Professional and Specialist groups in the NICS compared to the NI labour market.
Age	Take-up of housing benefits and rate relief.	Continue outreach activity and updating of literature.	Continued uptake in benefit.	Benefit reaches those vulnerable groups entitled to financial assistance. Continued uptake by new claimants.	Ongoing. Year on year increase.	LPS continued to provide new staff within the Application Based Rate Relief team with specialist courses on Age Awareness, Working with Older People and Introduction to Older People's Benefits training.
	Access to Government Services via electronic means.	Continuation of Digital Inclusion Programme activities, including continuation of Silver Surfers' day, Get Online Weeks and	Reduction of barriers to citizen access to online public services.	These digital inclusion activities will provide improved access to services (government and other) for those groups currently less able to avail of them via the web	Ongoing. Year on year increase.	Go ON NI included a specific programme of digital skills training for older people, including Silver Surfers Day and Get Online Weeks. 72% of people aged 50-64 and 45% of those aged over 65 now have

		continued liaison with the Libraries Network, and similar initiatives with other organisations to encourage digital participation.		channel. Also increased online communication skills could be used to access social media to assist with social inclusion.		access to the internet.
Marital Status	Law in NI treats unmarried fathers differently from married and unmarried mothers.	Consider amendments to current laws.	Initial consultation undertaken, but response rate was very low.	Equality of treatment .	Ongoing.	The Lord Chief Justice has initiated a Review of Civil and Family Justice and the work in relation to marital status will be combined with the work on any recommendations emerging from that Review.
Sexual Orientation	Data gaps.	Information on sexual orientation is collected from applicants and appointees.	Workforce Equal Opps monitoring.	More reliable data to help inform policy making.	Ongoing.	Relevant data collected from applicants and appointees.

| Disability | Access to information. | Continue outreach activity and updating of literature. | Continued uptake of benefit. | Benefit reaches those vulnerable groups entitled to financial assistance.

Continued uptake by new claimants. | Ongoing. | There were 1,212 new awards of Disabled Person's Allowance (DPA) during the 2015/16 year. In addition, improving communications for those with disabilities, and in particular access to information, is core to Land & Property Services strategic approach. The continuous review and revision of documents (print and web) and other communication channels has contributed to better performance, and importantly to the continued increase in benefits and reliefs uptake. |
| | Access to information. | Continuation of Digital Inclusion Programme activities, | Reduction of barriers to citizen access to online | These digital inclusion activities will provide improved access to services | | Connectability – a digital inclusion project which focuses on up-skilling individuals with disabilities in the use of |

| | | including continuation of Silver Surfers' day, Get Online Weeks and continued liaison with the Libraries Network, and similar initiatives with other organisations to encourage digital participation. | public services. | (government and other) for those groups currently less able to avail of them via the web channel. Also increased online communication skills could be used to access social media to assist with social inclusion. | | IT and developing their confidence to recognise the benefits of online access for learning and leisure.

We worked in partnership with local charities such as the Cedar Foundation, Action Mental Health, MS Society, Stepping Stones, NOW and the Orchardville Society to hold a series of training sessions for people with disabilities. Using specialist equipment and facilities provided by the charities, participants were trained in the use of the Internet and specific online services including the nidirect website. Disabled citizens were given one-to-one tuition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

						over the course of the sessions, which were held across a range of suitable locations.
Dependants	Take-up of housing benefit and rate relief.	Continue outreach activity and updating of literature.	Continued uptake.	Benefit reaches those vulnerable groups entitled to financial assistance.	Ongoing.	LPS staff attended 9 outreach events during 2015/16. These included Young at Heart, Exhibitions for older people and Volunteer Now Roadshows where all rate reliefs were promoted. We also addressed Headway outreach workers to raise awareness of Disabled Person's Allowance.
Gender	Under-representation of males/females in some occupational groups/grade levels in the NICS compared to the	Use of positive action advertising statements to encourage applications from under-represented group.	Workforce equal opportunities monitoring and Review of Gender representation in the NICS.	Reduction in degree of measured under-representation.	Ongoing.	The results of the 2013 Gender Review were published in May 2015. The review found continuing under-representation of males and females in some occupational

	NI labour market.					groups/grade levels in the NICS compared to the NI labour market.
Racial Group	Data gaps.	Information on place of birth is needed to allow more detailed analysis of ethnic background. This is collected from applicants and appointees.	Workforce equal opportunities monitoring.	More reliable data to help inform policy making.	Ongoing.	Plans are in place to obtain information on place of birth from existing staff.

In addition to the update provided for each of the section 75 categories, the following actions in 2015/16 are relevant to all section 75 groups:

Dignity at Work Policy

In 2007 a corporate Dignity at Work policy and complaints procedures were introduced, ensuring a consistent message was delivered to all staff about the important role each person has in creating and sustaining an environment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity. The Dignity at Work policy and procedures were reviewed and refined in 2015/16.

New Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy

In July 2015, CHR produced and launched a new policy statement on Equality Diversity and Inclusion. In order to provide a high quality service the NICS needs to attract, recruit, develop and retain the very best people at all levels. The new policy statement is based on three key principles:-

Equality – *we promote equality of opportunity by seeking to remove barriers, eliminating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunity and access for all groups of people.*

Diversity – *we accept each person as an individual. Our success is built on our ability to embrace diversity – and we believe that everyone should feel valued for their contributions. By working together we will deliver the best possible service for our staff, customers and stakeholders.*

Inclusion – *we create a working culture where differences are not merely accepted, but valued; where everyone has the opportunity to develop in a way that is consistent with, and adheres to, NICS values of impartiality, honesty, integrity and objectivity. Our aim is to be an organisation where people feel involved, respected and connected to our success.*

These principles of equality, diversity and inclusion will be reflected in the development or review of human resource policies.

NICS Diversity Champions

A 'Diversity Champions Network' was established within the NICS, with the emphasis on:

- the importance of raising the issue of diversity within the NICS and championing the benefits of a culture where diversity is celebrated;

- the value of a diverse workforce to enable the NICS to best serve the community it represents;

- that the NICS needs to go beyond compliance and needs to be more proactive in its approach to diversity;

- departments need to work in partnership with each other to promote diversity through both internal and external events.

Disability Action Plan: Progress against 2015-16 actions

	Measures	Timescale	Performance Indicators/Targets	2015/16 update
1.	The NICS diversity training is a mandatory training requirement for all staff. It raises awareness of employment legislation, including the DDA, and stresses the responsibility of all staff to treat colleagues and customers with dignity and respect and avoid acts of discrimination and harassment and other unacceptable behaviour in the workplace. The course highlights the 2 disability duties, but because the course has an internal focus, there is more emphasis on the duty to promote a positive attitude towards people with disabilities by making staff aware of the importance of recognising and valuing the contribution that staff with disabilities make to the work of the NICS.	Ongoing. Classroom training continues to be provided for all new entrants to the NICS and Industrial Staff.	All NICS staff will receive training either in the classroom or via the on-line package. Evidence from staff surveys that staff know about the NICS Equality and Diversity policy.	The NICS initially launched the Diversity Now mandatory training programme in June 2008, and staff completed this training by either attending classroom sessions or by taking the training course online. Both versions are interactive and challenge staff perceptions about equality and diversity. The Diversity Now course was reviewed and updated to include data from the 2011 Census and roll-out of refresher training began in 2014. All staff had a mandatory requirement to complete an e-learning course, Diversity Now, during 2015/16. The few who did not complete this were followed up. Completion rate was over 95%.

| 2. | Work experience opportunities for people with disabilities in the NICS.

The NICS has made a commitment to work with external disability organisations to develop structured work placement programmes to make sure that people with disabilities can gain real work opportunities and experience within the NICS to improve their opportunities of securing future employment.

The NICS recognises that for people with disabilities, work placements can be the key to accessing the world of work from which they might otherwise be excluded. Therefore work experience and work placement are excellent interventions to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to gain experience and skills in work which may lead to employment in the future.

In January 2014, Corporate HR introduced a pilot scheme aimed at facilitating placements specifically for those with a disability.

Applications were submitted to Corporate HR on behalf of individuals by a recognised disability organisation. | Pilot scheme launched and completed in 2014. Evaluation to be finalised in 2015. | Recommendations from the evaluation to be implemented in a revised scheme to be launched during 2015. | The pilot scheme was evaluated and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Corporate HR therefore liaised with (then) DEL colleagues and Disability Organisations to design the new permanent scheme which launched on 4 April 2016. This new scheme is aimed at providing structured work placements facilitated for individuals via Disability Organisations and ensures opportunities are specifically available for people with disabilities. The scheme is person centric as individuals can declare their preferences for placement including role, location and attendance pattern in their application, which once received by Corporate HR is forwarded to the most suitable department for consideration.

This scheme does not result in permanent employment however it gives individuals an insight into a possible career in the NICS and a route to gain experience |
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			which may help secure employment in the future. To date, the new scheme has received 22 applications and has resulted in 14 placements agreed with departments. Applications and detailed information regarding the new scheme is available through the NICS Recruitment website www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk.
3.	**NICS Policy on reasonable adjustments in the recruitment and selection process.** The aim of this policy is to ensure that the NICS recruitment and selection procedures provide equality of opportunity to people with disabilities so that they are encouraged to apply and compete for employment opportunities.	Policy launched and published in November 2012.	Policy to be reviewed and revised policy to be issued.	A review of the policy is ongoing.
4.	**NICS Marketing Strategy** Corporate HR has committed to developing a Marketing Strategy to promote the NICS as a career of choice. This strategy will focus on areas of underrepresentation in the NICS. It will consider outreach measures with a view to strengthening relationships with relevant representative groups.	Ongoing	Strategy to be developed and launched.	Development of strategy has been pushed back due to other work commitments.
5.	Continued provision of a centralised Welfare Support Service, including the Rehabilitation Programme, plus an Employment Assistance	Ongoing.	Assist staff to resolve work and personal issues.	Staff have continued to receive support and advice through these programmes.

	Programme to provide an independent and confidential service to all staff and managers to help them cope with and work through personal and work-related issues.			
6.	Continued operation of the NICS Dignity at Work policy and supporting procedures for resolving complaints. The policy is about creating and sustaining a productive working environment for all staff free from any form of inappropriate behavior. Procedures have been established to enable staff to raise complaints and have them addressed.	Ongoing.	Reduction in the number of complaints. Evidence from staff surveys that staff know about the policy and procedures and where to seek help.	The Dignity at Work policy remains current and fit for purpose.
7.	Staff surveys to include questions on equality and diversity to monitor changes in staff attitudes towards people with disabilities.	Ongoing.	Inclusion of relevant questions in staff surveys.	A staff survey was conducted in late 2015, with results available in March 2016. These are being carefully reviewed to identify appropriate actions.
8.	Continued monitoring of developments in legislation and case law in relation to disability and review of NICS policies as appropriate.	Ongoing.	Ensure NICS policies and practices are fit for purpose and reflect best practice.	Ongoing – no changes identified in 2015/16.
9.	Continued monitoring of equality data via the NISRA annual report "Equality Statistics for the NICS".	Ongoing.	Information on the proportion of people with disabilities in the NICS compared to the NI workforce.	The annual "Equality Statistics for the NICS" report was not produced during this period however NICS summary statistics were released..

				The annual "Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions" report was produced and analysed.
11	CAL to continue to offer a range of policy courses which cover Section 75 groups and other courses which focus on the needs of those with disabilities.	Ongoing.	Staff have the knowledge and skills to carry out screening, equality impact assessment and consultation exercises. Staff are aware of disability issues and have the skills to ensure they contribute to the statutory obligations under S75 and DDA.	Staff have availed of training available. In addition CAL has made available new courses such as the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Awareness and Supporting Vulnerable People e-learning. Details of 15/16 training courses are provided in our annual progress report to the Equality Commission.
12.	Digital Inclusion Programme activities to encourage people with disabilities to make more use of online services.	Ongoing.	Reduction of barriers to citizen access to online public services.	As well as the generic Go ON NI programme, in partnership with local charities/community groups, specific training sessions are available for people with disabilities to help increase the use of the Internet and specific online services including the nidirect website. Disabled citizens can be given one-to-one tuition over the course of the

				sessions. A pilot project has commenced in partnership with Supporting Communities and the Heath Trusts to provide specific IT training for carers.
13.	Land and Property Services will continue involvement with organisations such as CAB, Disability Action, Help the Aged with regard to communication of and maximising take up of Rate Reliefs by vulnerable groups.	Ongoing.	Take up of Rate Reliefs.	Work has continued to promote the take up of Rate Reliefs by vulnerable groups. There were 1,212 new awards of Disabled Person's Allowance (DPA) during the 2015/16 year.