



**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to</b>	Shadow Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Draft Shadow Council Equality Scheme, Disability Action Plan</b>
<b>Date:</b>	28 November 2014
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Nicola Lane, Good Relations Manager (Ext 6020)
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Stella Gilmartin, Equality & Diversity Officer (Ext 6026)

<b>1</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	Following the public consultation period on the Council's revised draft Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan, SSP&R is asked to approve the revised Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan, and the proposed Council response to the consultation comments (attached Appendix 1).
1.2	Committee Members will recall that they considered reports outlining revised guidance from the Equality Commission on S75 duties and the implications for Local Government Reform and the establishment of the Shadow Council.
1.3	The revised guidance required Councils to prepare a revised Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan, drawn up in accordance with a model template issued by the Equality Commission, and consult with the public. In addition all public authorities are requested to undertake an Audit of Inequalities and develop an Equality Action Plan and Disability Action yearly plans. The Commission acknowledge that the situation for Belfast is different than other Councils.
1.4	The Commission has acknowledged that Equality Action Plans may be more usefully developed post scheme. In accordance with this, the draft Equality Scheme included a commitment to develop an Equality Action Plan within six months of 1 April 2015 i.e. from the date of the new Council taking on its full functions.

1.5	The Council's Disability Action Plan items are still current until 2015. The Equality Commission and Disability Action have been informed we will be resubmitting a new Disability Action Plan in 2015-2016.
1.6	Committee Members will recall that on 29 August 2014, the draft revised Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plans were approved for consultation. The main change was to reflect the Shadow Council.

<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	<b>Consultation process</b>
	The Council's Equality Consultation List (known as the AA list) was updated in September 2012. All consultees received an electronic copy of the revised Equality Scheme, and the Disability Action Plan, a consultation response form and an opportunity to update their details on the Council's consultation list.
2.2	In addition, the documents were presented to consultees at a NI regional equality consultation event at Lagan Valley Island Civic Centre on 24 September 2014 held in partnership with the Local Government Staff Commission.
2.3	The Council received 6 formal written responses, from the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), the Equality Coalition, Disability Action and NIACRO and the Equality Commission, in addition to comments from the Regional Event. All consultees' responses are recorded, considered and draft responses are included for your consideration. These are outlined at Appendix 1.
2.4	<b>Comments received</b>
	<u>Equality Commission</u>
	The Equality Commission requested a few minor changes to the Draft revised Equality Scheme and noted that the Council will be developing new items for inclusion in the Disability Action Plan over the next six months in collaboration with Disability Action.
	The Equality Commissions comments have been taken into account and all amendments included in the Final draft Equality Scheme; the proposed Council response to each comment is attached in Appendix 1.
	<u>Disability Action and NIACRO</u>
	The response from Disability Action was on the Disability Action Plan which will be addressed later and Disability Action have agreed to further discussions on this. The NIACRO response was generically sent to all Councils it relates to HR issues and does not require changes to the

scheme.

#### CAJ/ Equality Coalition

The CAJ response and the Equality Coalition are identical and generically submitted to all City, Borough and District Councils and to the Local Government Staff Commission. The response from CAJ/ Equality Coalition requested amendments to the definition of Good Relations and also decoupling 'good relations' from EQIAs and screening (i.e. that the current good relations impact questions are removed and hence decoupled from screening and equality impact assessment exercises).

They also recommend that any consideration of good relations in the context of policy appraisal is limited to following an EQIA, provision to explore whether there is an opportunity for complimentary 'good relations' measures to tackle prejudice and promote understanding

In addition to the above matters on 'good relations' CAJ also recommended that the new equality schemes also contain commitments to: publish Council screening templates online and take reasonable steps to inform consultees of same; and that audits of inequalities will be consulted on and also published.

#### Comments from Regional Event

Disability Action, RNIB, the British Deaf Association and the Equality Coalition raised issues concerning improved communication issues.

The Council has consulted the Equality Commission on these comments as it is a model scheme and currently includes a definition of Good Relations which the Council uses. The ECNI is suggesting that a new definition of Good Relations will be brought forward as the TBUC strategy is developed. They are recommending that we do not change the good relations definition until this process is complete.

ECNI also consider there to be an inter-dependence between the two Section 75 duties. As a consequence the committee is recommended to respond to the CAJ and the Equality Coalition to inform them of the forthcoming move via the Equality Commission and that the Council will await the outcome of this before changing its scheme.

### **2.7 Next Steps**

The closing date for the consultation was 21 November 2014. We are aware the Council Committee Cycle will not enable us to present a final Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan to the Commission by the due date of the 26 November 2014. The Equality and Diversity Officer has discussed this with the Equality Commission and they have agreed that we present the draft Equality Scheme with a holding letter indicating the date the final version will be submitted.

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	Minimal – to be met by the Good Relations Unit’s revenue budget

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Implications</b>
4.1	There is no requirement to conduct an equality screening exercise in this instance.

<b>5</b>	<b>Call In</b>
5.1	This decision is subject to Call In.

<b>6</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
6.1	<p>SSP&amp;R is requested to note this report and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree responses to consultation comments outlined in Consultation Report (Appendix 1)</li> <li>• Approve revised Equality Scheme with amendments (Appendix 2)</li> <li>• Approve revised Disability Action Plan (Appendix 3)</li> <li>• approve submission of report to Shadow Council</li> </ul>

<b>7</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
Stella Gilmartin, Equality and Diversity Officer, Good Relations Unit	

<b>8</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
8.1	<p>CAJ - Committee on the Administration of Justice</p> <p>NIACRO - Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders</p>

<b>9</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
9.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation Report (Appendix 1)</li> <li>• Revised Equality Scheme (Appendix 2)</li> <li>• Revised Disability Action Plan (Appendix 3)</li> </ul>