



EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY NEWS

Issue 1

August 2015

Introduction

I write to introduce the first issue of our Equality and Diversity newsletter.

This newsletter is designed to update you on the progress being made towards achieving our aim to support and assist councils to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations as an Employer, a Service Provider and a Civic Leader by working with our stakeholders and responding to their needs.

We intend to produce a newsletter every six months during the lifetime of the Equality and Diversity Strategy which is due to be reviewed in 2017.

We would welcome your thoughts, comments and any ideas you may have to improve this newsletter.

We want to keep the content informative and easy to read so we will present you with examples of good practice and activities as well as signposting relevant developments in equality and diversity across local government.

Jacqui Dixon
Chair, Equality and Diversity Group, and
Chief Executive, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

Equality and Diversity Dedicated Web Page

Please check the dedicated webpage at <http://www.lgsc.org.uk/new-initiatives/equality-and-diversity/> Information on all aspects of the work of the Equality and Diversity Group can be found on this page.

In addition to this dedicated web resource a password protected area for Diversity Champions has been created on the Staff Commission's website. This resource will allow Diversity Champions to access key information to assist them to carry out their role.

Diversity Champions will receive an email in the near future detailing login details.

Equality E Learning Module

Equality in the Workplace - This module is aimed at ALL staff and is available to view on the Learning Management System. Contact the Equality and Diversity Group secretariat for more information at Commission House on 028 9031 3200.

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Diversity Champion Workshop

To support the Diversity Champions the Commission is facilitating a programme of events. The first of these was held on Wednesday 1 July 2015 in Clotworthy House, Antrim.

This event considered the role of Diversity Champions, and gave the Diversity Champions the opportunity to identify their priorities and determine how the Equality and Diversity Group can support them in their role.

The Workshop was attended by Diversity Champions from nine councils. The context was provided by Bronagh Hinds of DemocraShe with an overview of the work of the Equality and Diversity Group. John Kremer, Equality Consultant gave a detailed presentation on equality and diversity and outlined a 10-step approach to championing equity and diversity in local government (see below for details). The role of the Diversity Champion was summarised by Dr Adrian Kerr, Chief Executive, Local Government Staff Commission.

The Outcomes and Agreed Actions from the Workshop

- Three Elected Member Diversity Champions have agreed to represent the Diversity Champions on the Equality and Diversity Group.
- A shared space for Diversity Champions is to be created on the Staff Commission's website to facilitate discussion, shared learning and joint problem solving.
- It was agreed that consideration should be given to joint procurement of services, eg, translation.
- It was agreed to develop joint projects within and between councils.

Championing Equity and Diversity ... Where to Begin?

A Ten Step Approach. Practical Guidance outlined by John Kremer to Diversity Champions at the Workshop on 01 July.

Part 1 - Taking Stock

1. Undertake a Culture Audit
2. Undertake an Access Audit
3. Develop a Policy Audit Mechanism (ie, Section 75)
4. Consider Affirmative/Positive Action Initiatives (eg, advertising, outreach measures, work-life balance)
5. Training/communicating (eg, Corporate Plan)

Part 2 - Policies and Procedures

6. Recruitment and Selection Policies and Procedures
7. Monitoring and Consultation Arrangements (including exit interviewing)
8. Equality and Diversity Portfolio
9. Performance Management Procedures
10. Conflict and Complaints Resolution Procedures (formal and non-formal)

Network of Diversity Champions

The appointment of a network of Diversity Champions to actively promote the equality and diversity agenda in councils is a key element of the Equality and Diversity initiative. Councils have committed to the initiative by appointing both an officer and elected member to act as Diversity Champion.

A **role specification** has been developed for Diversity Champions setting out how they work closely with other colleagues at a number of different levels within the organisation.

To supplement this a **person specification** detailing the knowledge and skills required to champion equality and diversity across the council.

These two documents can help the Diversity Champions identify the general, targeted and personal support required from the Equality and Diversity Group



Equality and Diversity
in Local Councils

The Framework covers everyone who uses the Council's services, facilities and accesses 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**

Equality and Diversity Framework

Councils are required to comply with anti-discrimination legislation and Section 75 of the NI Act 1998.

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

The Diversity Champions, appointed by each Council, assist with the implementation of the Equality and Diversity Framework by driving positive actions and acting as a contact point for issues relating to the 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.

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.

Each Principle details the actions that will be taken by the Council to make sure the Equality and Diversity Framework is implemented. There are also details of the relevant policies, procedures and guidance that link to the Principle.

The Framework was endorsed by the former 26 councils. In April 2015 the Equality and Diversity Group wrote to the 11 new councils to seek their co-operation by including the Framework on the agenda of an appropriate meeting in order to have the document formally endorsed by each Council.

Financial Support for Equality and Diversity Events

The Staff Commission and Local Government Training Group have established a budget specifically to part-fund equality and diversity events in councils. The budget is administered by the Equality and Diversity Group, and in 2014/15, they awarded financial support of £8,500 to 7 councils, either individually or working in clusters.

The Staff Commission wrote to councils in July seeking requests for financial assistance to host an equality and diversity event before 31 March 2016. Requests from councils will be considered after 02 October 2015.

Examples of events supported in 2014/15 include:

- Food safety events in Mandarin Chinese
- 'Women in Sport' event
- Development of an Equality Toolkit and showcase event
- Cultural seminars for BME communities
- Visible Women's Conference
- Sexual Orientation and Transgender Awareness Training
- 'Challenges and Opportunities' programme of events

Equality and Diversity Group

The Equality and Diversity Group is the strategic decision making body with responsibility for:

- ◆ The development of the overall strategic direction for equality and diversity initiatives in local government
- ◆ Determining priorities and setting objectives
- ◆ Monitoring progress and reporting to the Local Government Staff Commission on a regular basis

Membership of the Equality and Diversity Group

Jacqui Dixon, Chief Executive, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council is Chair of the Equality and Diversity Group. Representatives from Disability Action, Community Relations Council, Equality Commission, NIPSA, Equality Coalition, Rainbow Project and DemocraShe are members of the Group. The following three Elected Member Diversity Champions will also attend the next meeting:

- Cllr Mark Brooks, Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Cllr Michael Goodman, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Cllr Cáthal Mallaghan, Mid Ulster District Council

Update on Equality and Diversity Group Activity

The Equality and Diversity Group are developing a strategic plan to assist the new councils to demonstrate that improvements and equality outcomes are being delivered across local government. The Equality and Diversity Group has been informed by the following:

- Women, Peace and Security: Women's Rights and Gender Equality – A Strategic Guide and Toolkit by Bronagh Hinds and Debbie Donnelly published in June 2014.
- The OFMDFM commissioned research undertaken by Ulster University entitled 'An Investigation of Gender Equality Issues at the Executive Level of the Northern Ireland Public Sector Organisations'. The key findings were published in October 2014.
- The annual conference of the Institute of British Irish Studies, in July, which links academics and practitioners in discussion of key issues and this year the theme was Women in Leadership North and South.

Diversity Champions can access this information by logging into the Shared Space on the Commission's website www.lgsc.org.uk

Contact Us

Give us a call for more information about our work promoting the equality and diversity agenda in local government

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Visit us on the web at
www.lgsc.org.uk



Equality and Diversity
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The next Equality and Diversity Group meeting is scheduled for Thursday 17 September