Women in Local Councils Week 2012

International Women’s Day 08 March 2012

Councils across Northern Ireland continued to support International Women’s Day on 08 March by holding events for women employees and women in the community.

Since 1908, International Women’s Day has been used as a platform to build awareness of women’s issues and mark the economic, political and social achievements of women.

In order to build on this success, and to avoid duplication of effort, the Commission established a single Equality and Diversity Group encompassing the work of the Women’s Development Steering Group and the Disability in Local Councils Stakeholder Group, and including all other equality and diversity work in councils, including Section 75 statutory duties.

The Equality and Diversity Group has responsibility for the overall strategic direction for equality and diversity initiatives in local government. The Group reports to the Local Government Staff Commission on the strategic direction, objectives and initiatives on a regular basis.

This year the Equality and Diversity Group encouraged councils to designate the week from Monday 05 to Friday 09 March 2012, Women in Local Councils week.

The Group has been delighted with the response as many councils have held an event during this week to highlight the progress which has been made in individual councils. This Newsletter highlights a number of council events.

Local Government Equality and Diversity Strategy 2012/13

Mervyn Rankin, Chair of the Local Government Staff Commission will introduce the Launch, as an extremely important opportunity to focus on the equality and diversity issues that are central to putting people first in local government as Employers, Service Providers and Civic Leaders.

Through the morning there will be case studies centred around the three key strategic areas. The presentations include contributions from:

♦ Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council
♦ Derry City Council
♦ Ballymena Borough Council
♦ Rainbow Project

The Strategy has been determined in consultation with key stakeholders and reflects the identified needs for the sector.
Female students from St. Patrick’s High School Keady, St. Catherine’s College Armagh and City of Armagh High School celebrated International Women’s Day by attending the Council’s ‘Armagh – A City of Women Leaders’ event in St. Patrick’s Trian.

Siobhan McGarry, local Journalist hosted the event introducing the audience to a range of influential women leaders which included Cllr Freda Donnelly, Mayor and Diversity Champion, Mary Bunting and Margaret Stanley, Joint Secretaries to the North South Ministerial Council, Mairead Mackle, Managing Director, Homecare Independent Living and Carol Corvan, Strategic Director of Corporate Services and Governance.

The women addressed the young audience by highlighting to them their own personal experiences, their family life, their chosen career path, what was good and what was challenging for them.

Mayor Freda Donnelly commented “It is great to see all the young women… I hope you are inspired by what our speakers have to say as you may well be in the process of making difficult career choices yourselves in the near future.”

The Launch of Newtownabbey Borough Council’s Women and Work Project on International Women’s Day was attended by Adrian Watson, Asset Skills NI.

The Project is also supported by the Training Group.

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Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council

Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council hosted a ‘Women’s Conference’ to coincide with International Women’s Day and was organised through Council’s Gender Action Working Group as part of ‘Women in Local Councils Week’.

The theme of the conference was ‘Yes I can’ and aimed to inspire women to realise their goals and to take up more opportunities in business, public life, politics etc. There were a number of speakers including:- Tracy Meharg, Invest N.I, Agnes Lunny, Chief Executive of Positive Futures and some local entrepreneurs:- Andrea O’Rourke of ‘Lights, Camera… Confidence’, Monica McGeary, Source Business Leads and Colleen Lowry, ‘Blessingbourne – Self Catering Apartments & Bike Trail’ who outlined their success stories and experiences including some of the barriers they overcame along the way.

Tracy Meharg of Invest NI said: “A proactive and positive attitude is essential for anyone who wants to succeed in business and realise their potential, particularly in today’s climate. I believe that women have a valued and important role in the economy”.

Pictures From the ‘yes I can’ Conference

“‘We need to continue to support more women to start and grow businesses here in order to try to redress this balance.”

Belfast City Council

Belfast City Council celebrated International Women’s Day with a lunchtime event in the City Hall.

This provided an opportunity to celebrate ordinary women who have changed society over the years through their work for equal rights and social progress.

The event recognised the exciting developments planned for Belfast in 2012 and the opportunities they create, particularly in light of the recently launched investment programme.

At the event opened by the Lord Mayor Councillor Niall Ó Donnghaile and Councillor Bernie Kelly, gender champion, staff heard the personal experiences of Baroness May Blood and Kirstie McMuray (Cool FM Breakfast show) working in very different job roles.
The Commission aims to be ‘the strategic organisation for the development of human resource management and the promotion of excellence through people in the delivery of local government services in Northern Ireland’.

The Commission has grouped specific actions and target outcomes into four Key Performance Areas in order to implement its statutory duties. The Equality and Diversity strategic objective 2012-2015 is to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all by promoting an environment free from all forms of unlawful discrimination and where diversity is valued.

The Equality and Diversity Group sets the strategic direction for equality and diversity in local government and reports to the Commission on a regular basis.

Women in Local Councils Week 2013

This roundup of events and activities held by Councils during the 2012 Women in Local Councils Week and in celebration of International Women’s Day has hopefully given ideas of what could be organised for 2013!

Next year, lead by the Equality and Diversity Group and supported by key partners including the Equality Commission NI, Disability Action, Equality Coalition, NIPSA and the Community Relations Council the Women in Local Councils Week will be used as a framework within which equalities and diversity issues can be mainstreamed.

Councils will be encouraged to explore the biggest challenges of ensuring that complex equality and diversity issues are addressed and raising awareness of innovative and successful approaches to managing diversity that put people first.

There are lots of examples of really good practice across local government as shown by the case studies highlighted in this Newsletter.

Support is essential and the Commission has committed to support the Diversity Champions Network through action learning, a development programme and Network meetings.

‘How to’ guidance and further details will be issued to councils from November 2012.

In the meantime get more information on the Commission’s website www.lgsc.org.uk