

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Authority 2010 – 2011 Annual Progress Report On Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Order (DDO) 2006

Name of public authority

Office of the Social Fund Commissioner for Northern Ireland

Equality Officer and DDO

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Please indicate whether you would prefer to receive correspondence from the Commission by:

Post

Electronically

Reporting Period 01/04/10 to 31/03/11

Main initiatives planned in the coming year to ensure the authority improves outcomes in terms of equality of opportunity and good relations for individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75?

- To draw up and implement a new Equality Scheme in line with the new guidelines.

- We have carried out a stakeholder survey and will take any necessary steps to improve our service as indicated by the stakeholder responses.

Examples of changes to policies or practices which have resulted in outcomes. If the change was a result of an EQIA please tick the appropriate box in column 3 and reference the title of the relevant EQIA in the space provided below:

	Outline change in policy or practice which have resulted in outcomes	Tick if result of EQIA
Persons of different religious belief	None	
Persons of different political opinion	None	
Persons of different racial groups	None	
Persons of different age	None	
Persons with different marital status	None	
Persons of different sexual orientation	None	
Men and women generally	None	
Persons with and without a disability	None	
Persons with and without dependants	None	

Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

- Equality objectives and targets were included in our corporate plan. Staff Performance Agreements include targets and references to equality duties.
- Collection and monitoring of data on the customers who used our services. Results from this were used to target which groups needed specific attention through our Customer Led Review.

- During the period covered by this report, staff received updates on equality and disability issues at team meetings held on 21 April, 25 May, 29 June, 28 July, 24 Aug, 22 Sept, 21 Dec and 27 Jan. This ensured that statutory equality duties were mainstreamed into the work of the organisation.
- Delivery of our External Focus programme where we provide awareness sessions/workshops for interested groups. The Commissioner and Office manager extended personal invitations to 4 organisations during visits:
 - Carers NI
 - Gingerbread
 - Triangle Housing
 - Windsor Women’s Group
- Seven workshops were successfully delivered during this period. Feedback from the sessions carried out during this cycle indicated that our service was informative and very beneficial within the individual organisations.
 - Gingerbread
 - De Paul
 - NIACRO
 - Ards CAB
 - Triangle Housing
 - Bangor CAB
 - Christians Against Poverty

Section 2: Screening

- Please provide an update of new/proposed/revised policies screened during the year.

Title of policy subject to screening	Was the <u>F</u> ull Screening Report or the <u>R</u> esult of initial screening issued for consultation? <i>Please enter <u>F</u> or <u>R</u></i>	Was initial screening decision changed following consultation? <u>Y</u> es/ <u>N</u> o	Is policy being subject to EQIA? <u>Y</u> es/ <u>N</u> o? If yes indicate year for assessment.
Telephone SOI 04/01/11 (revision of existing policy)	F	No	No

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Section 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

Please provide an update of policies subject to EQIA during 2010-11, stage 7 EQIA monitoring activities and an indicative EQIA timetable for 2011-12

- None

Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities April 2010- March 2011

Title of EQIA subject to Stage 7 monitoring	Indicate if differential impacts previously identified have reduced or increased	Indicate if adverse impacts previously identified have reduced or increased
Customer Led Review. (level of engagement from customers with Mental health problems)	Reduced	Reduced

- Please outline any proposals, arising from the authority's monitoring for adverse impacts, for revision of the policy to achieve better outcomes the relevant equality groups:

None

Section 4: Training

- Belfast Trust Continence Team and Fibromyalgia NI delivered workshops to our staff on 03/06/11 and 08/11/10. This provided us with increased knowledge and insight on the problems faced by individuals and their families who live with these conditions.
- The Equality Officer attended a 2 day training course on awareness of Section 75 statutory duties and the EQIA process in January 2011. This provided an insight into subsequent action needed and the steps

needed when a policy is screened in and is subject to an EQIA. The officer found this very informative and helpful and has increased knowledge on this issue.

Section 5: Communication

- Our commitment and progress on our duties are included in our Corporate Strategy and Annual Report. These documents are available on our website.
- Our annual progress report on Section 75 duties through-out the period 09/10 was published on our website in September 10.
- Staff received updates on equality and disability issues at team meetings which are held through-out the year. Our statutory duties form part of the core agenda used on these occasions.
- The Social Fund Commissioner and Office Manager met with a total of 6 organisations representing particular groups through-out this period. These were:
 - Carers NI
 - Triangle
 - Gingerbread
 - Windsor Women's Centre
 - Disability Action
 - The Children's Commissioner for NI
- This helped to raise awareness of our organisation's services and our commitment to promoting equality of opportunity. It also improved our understanding of the challenges they face and the issues that are important to them that are affected by the Social Fund.

Section 6: Data Collection & Analysis

- Analysis of the customers who failed to engage with the review process following EQIA of our Customer Led Review Policy in 2008. Our standard non response rate continues to remain around the 10%

mark, which indicates that, the vast majority of our customers are engaging with the review process. This year's statistics show that the percentage within this non response group who had mental health issues fell from 41% to 34.2%. We will continue to monitor this yearly.

- We continue to consult the Equality Commission's Section 75 Monitoring guidelines on any issues that arise.

Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

- We continue to offer translation and interpretation services on request on a wide range of different languages and also in accessible formats such as Braille, large type and audio. We also have the provision of a language line for those customers wishing to speak with us directly in their first language concerning their review.
- We continually strive to ensure that principles of using plain English are evident in our decisions and information leaflets. We are also happy to deal with customer representatives if necessary.
- Our most commonly used information leaflets have been translated into various languages and are available on our website and also on request in hard copy.
- We provide a free phone text phone service to our customers with hearing difficulties. Our free phone number is highlighted on our correspondence with individuals and also on our website.
- Our website continues to be audited for accessibility purposes and complies with standards.
- Awareness of our services was increased by the visits made to various organisations by the Social Fund Commissioner and Office Manager and by the workshops delivery through our External Focus programme.
- Awareness of our services was also increased through the issuing of our stakeholder survey, which was sent to 283 organisations.

Section 8: Complaints

- Our complaint procedure is outlined in Chapter 3 of our Equality Scheme. During the period covered by this report we have received no complaints relating to Section 75 issues.

Section 9: Consultation and Engagement

- Meetings with the Social Fund Commissioner and OSFC Office Manager were held with the groups listed in section 5. These events highlighted OSFC's service, encouraged direct applications to be made and enabled us to gain an insight into the issues faced by these groups.
- Invitations were issued to a total of 4 organisations and we delivered a total of 7 workshops to the groups listed in section 1.
- All OSFC staff engaged in a workshop with a representative from Belfast Trust Continence team on 03/06/10 and Fibromyalgia NI on 08/11/10.

Section 10: The Good Relations Duty

- We continue to communicate with representative groups throughout the year through our External Focus programme. These sessions are primarily used to provide guidance and awareness of the Social Fund and the independent review process. However they also give our staff increased knowledge on the issues faced by individual groups.
- General reference of the Equality Commission's Guidance on Good Relations was made through this reporting cycle.

Section 11: New/Revised Equality Schemes

If the Commission has notified you of its intention to request a new/revised scheme or formally requested a new/revised scheme and associated action

plan, please outline below what progress has been made in this reporting period.

- OSFC's Equality Officer attended the Equality Commission's workshop in June 2010 about the new guidelines issued earlier this year regarding Section 75 duties.
- OSFC received communication from the Equality Commission on 02/08/11 notifying of intent to formally request a revised Equality Scheme on 01/11/11. In line with the timescales given by the Equality Commission and in line with the new guidance we aim to develop a plan of action to meet this statutory requirement.

Section 12: Additional Comments

- Continue to monitor our customer data base. This will provide information on 5 of the 9 Section 75 categories: men and women generally, marital status, age, persons with a dependant and persons with a disability. Results of this will determine whether any further initiatives are needed to promote equality of opportunity.
- Continue to ensure that Equality and Disability issues are included in our regular team briefings.
- Maintain our External Focus programme in which we offer free workshops to any interested groups.
- Continue to invite talks with appropriate bodies to help raise staff awareness of issues facing particular groups for example people with disabilities etc.
- The Social Fund Commissioner and Office Manager will continue to meet with organisations representing particular groups throughout the year to raise awareness of OSFC's services.

Annual Report 1 April 2010 / 31 March 2011
'Disability Duties' Questions

1. How many action measures for this **reporting period** have been

5

Fully
Achieved?

Partially
Achieved?

Not
Achieved?

2. Please outline the following detail on **all actions that have been fully achieved** in the reporting period.

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ¹	Outcomes / Impact ²
National ³			
Regional ⁴	Meeting with the Social Fund Commissioner and OSFC Manager	5 meetings held	Feedback from these used to inform policy decisions on the Social Fund Independent review and the wider Social Fund agenda.
Local ⁵	External Focus	7 workshops delivered	Feedback from these sessions are taken into account in any changes to office policy.

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Staff Training	Talk with Belfast Trust Continence team June 10	Increased knowledge on the help available from the trust
2	Staff Training	Talk with Fibromyalgia NI Nov 10	Increased knowledge of the difficulties faced by customers and families of those customers who have this condition.
3			
4			

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Team meetings	Communication of disability duties in staff meetings held approximately every 6 weeks	To ensure that Disability duties continue to be mainstreamed in our business.
2			
3			

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions, has your organisation either:
- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
 - taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

No