



Public Authority Review Report

**REPORT TO THE EQUALITY COMMISSION ON
FIVE YEAR REVIEW OF EQUALITY SCHEME**

This report can be found on the EONI website www.eoni.org.uk
and can also be made available in alternative formats on request

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Public Authority Five Year Review Report

Executive Summary

Please provide some main conclusions in terms of:

a) To what extent has your public authority's approved scheme provided a workable basis for mainstreaming the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations into policy-making over the past five years?

The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland's (EONI) equality scheme has proved workable, although resource intensive at times, particularly during consultation exercises and full EQIAs. Initially, the services of a consultant were used to take forward EONI's equality agenda under Section 75. However, after approximately two years, it was decided that there was sufficient expertise to take this forward with existing internal resources. During the 5 year period the importance of mainstreaming has been effectively implemented which ensures that all EONI staff, who are responsible for policy or operational development, integrate equality of opportunity and good relations into the development process – the need for full EQIAs has therefore declined.

b) What key lessons have been learnt over the past five years in terms of effectively implementing the approved equality scheme?

The importance of senior management demonstrating a commitment to effectively implement the equality scheme is of key importance. Objectives and targets relating to Section 75 duties have been incorporated within Corporate and Business Plans and the

Management Board monitors the progress of targets on a monthly basis. However, expectations in relation to the consultation process have been under estimated. It has become evident that some organisations eg, CoSO, Help the Aged, do not have the resources in terms of time and staff to participate in the consultation of screening exercise. EONI does regularly receive feedback from Disability Action but contributions from stakeholders to consultation on the screening process are diminishing. To address this the CEO regularly engages directly with local community groups eg, with regard to access to polling stations which presented problems for those with disabilities, to ensure changes were made to accommodate voters with disabilities.

c) What more needs to be done to achieve outcomes for individuals from the nine equality categories?

Building on the direct process of pro-active engagement with targeted representative groups rather than rely on the consultation process during policy development will prove more successful in achieving outcomes. EONI has recently developed a marketing strategy to target under-represented and marginalised groups. EONI will encourage registration by young people by promoting the Electoral Identity Card as a proof of age card for entry to licensed premises and to prove identity for air travel. Following pressure from the Chief Electoral Officer it is expected that the current archaic common law provisions on mental capacity will cease to have effect on 1 July 2008.

1. A general introductory statement specifying the purpose of the scheme and the public authority's commitment to the statutory duties.

The purpose of EONI's Equality Scheme is to fulfill obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 on the promotion of equality or opportunity and good relations. The Chief Electoral Officer and staff of EONI are committed to providing equality to all those people of Northern Ireland, eligible to register to vote, regardless of whichever group within the Section 75 categories they may belong.

The scheme sets out how EONI proposes to fulfill the commitment of the CEO to equality of opportunity with regard to all policies, powers, duties and functions.

1a) To what extent were senior management involved in ensuring scheme compliance over the 5 year period and what further steps could be undertaken to ensure effective internal arrangements?

Initially, the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer had sole responsibility for ensuring compliance with the scheme. However, operational practice developed from 2005 to decentralise the responsibility and to ensure all new policies are screened by the appropriate member of staff who will determine the need for a full EQIA and to consult. To this end a centralised stakeholder list is accessible on EONI's records management system which provides contact details of consultees. This means that there is effective mainstreaming of equality throughout the organisation.

During the five year period senior management have driven a number of initiatives to ensure scheme compliance and the integration of equality issues, particularly in relation to the implementation of a communications strategy which introduced:

- Monthly Management Board meetings where pertinent equality issues are discussed, fully minuted and published on EONI website.
- Team Briefings which inform staff of management decisions on equality, key issues, new procedures and implementation or review of method of work.
- Team Leaders'/Equality Steering Groups – now Area Electoral Office meetings.
- Focus Groups to 'brainstorm' new areas of work, taking into consideration section 75 obligations when planning for key activities, reviewing and evaluating materials or events.
- Away Days which involve corporate sessions in a location away from EONI to address important issues, including equality and where staff receive training.
- Helpline, which was introduced in 2005. EONI continues to make its advice service available equally to all those in our community.

Following the 2005 combined elections senior management reviewed the returns made by polling staff and their supervisors. This was entered on to a dedicated polling place database and reviewed and assessed to determine locations used for polling which were unsatisfactory, to facilitate those in three of the section 75 categories

– disabled, persons with dependents and the elderly. This work is ongoing.

Senior Management continue to use quantitative and qualitative data provided by the Electoral Commission’s subcontracted statisticians in relation to under-representation on the electoral register by young people, those in disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities. With this evidence senior management continue to drive strategies to target such groups to increase their representation on the electoral register. Internal arrangements have improved in mainstreaming equality within EONI and the Management Board gives due consideration on a monthly basis to equality issues in relation to new policies and procedures.

1b) Outline annual **direct** expenditure of resources to ensure that the statutory duties were complied with, in terms of staff and money over the past 5 years, and comment on the extent that all necessary resources were allocated.

Year	Full Time Equivalent Staff	Approx £'s *
2002/03	.2	17,500
2003/04	.2	21,800
2004/05	.2	21,400
2005/06	.4	22,500
2006/07	.4	15,300

* Includes costs for staff, training, consultants, advertising, printing, stationery

As a consequence of the success of mainstreaming there is a reduction in expenditure that is solely on the promotion of equality.

2. An outline of how the public authority intends to assess its compliance with the Section 75 duties and for consulting on matters to which a duty under that section is likely to be relevant.

The CEO, in the Equality Scheme, gave a commitment for assessing compliance with Section 75 duties and consulting, through:

- An inclusive and interactive process of screening policies, powers, functions and duties;
- Undertaking EQIAs as appropriate;
- Engagement with organisations including the Community Relations Council, Equality Commission, Equality Forum for NI and political parties;
- Producing an annual report on the progress made over a five year period;
- Liaising with the Political Directorate of the Northern Ireland Office.

The Management Board at its meeting in December 07 agreed to develop a good relations strategy and an associated action plan. The initial stage in this process is to conduct good relations audits and it is felt that it will be sufficient at this point to conduct these internally – when the strategy is developed it will go to external consultation and interested parties will have the opportunity to comment. An audit, in this context, is a method of systematic review which helps to determine the existing state of relationships internally, or with customers and stakeholders, in order to identify what current work promotes good relations. It will enable EONI to identify where there

is potential for further or better promotion and thus identify key areas or policies for strategic action.

EONI has decided to first conduct a good relations audit of our four main areas of work – registration, elections, central services and corporate governance, to determine the key areas with the greatest potential for promoting good relations – and also those which might have a negative impact on relations which could be improved with mitigating measures or alternative policies. Of course an audit will also be required in respect of Information Services as the work carried out by that section underpins all other activities throughout the organisation.

Each function will be broken down into its component parts and policies, and each component then considered for its potential for promoting good relations. If there is such potential, these areas should be assessed for their impact on good relations with regard to:

- customers
- stakeholders
- employees
- wider context of Northern Ireland.

Subsequently, a list of areas to be addressed can be drawn up and form the basis of the EONI action plan for promoting good relations. In tandem with the audits, EONI also consulted with staff by conducting a short attitude survey at a staff residential in February

2008. The results of this will enable EONI to identify issues and concerns which they may feel impact on good relations within the organisation or with customers.

2a) Outline impacts and outcomes (for the public authority and/or individuals from the nine equality categories) over the past five years and what further steps could be undertaken to build on these or address underreporting?

The impact and outcome of each current or new policy, function or duty is assessed through screening/impact, monitoring and critically reviewing annual progress reports. For example, in relation to the equality impact assessment on preparing and maintaining an electoral register, the screening exercise, which drew mainly on the experiences of Area Electoral Officers, concluded that it was possible that there could be discrimination by electoral canvassers on the grounds of religious belief, i.e. failing to canvass households whose occupants held different religious beliefs from those of the canvasser. EONI concluded that the approach to the conduct of the annual canvass could have an adverse impact on some people on the grounds of their religious belief. The outcome was EONI took measures to mitigate the possible adverse impact by insisting on close supervision of the canvass by Area Electoral Officers, in consultation with local representative groups. EONI intends to build on this for any future canvasses to ensure the appropriate equality training is provided.

The impact of quantitative data is also significant - evidence from the Electoral Commission's update report prepared by Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC) statisticians indicated that, inter alia, eligible young people in Northern Ireland were under-represented on the register. The outcome - EONI included in the 2004 canvass, in conjunction with the Electoral Commission, outreach measures to improve the representation of more eligible young people on the register. The representation of eligible young people in the 2004 canvass had significantly increased, and the process was repeated in further canvasses. However, the published Register in 2007 showed a marked decrease in the number of young people on the Register. This was largely due to no canvass - the system of registration has been changed to remove the requirement for electors to complete an annual registration form through the canvass process. From 2008, EONI is expected to have power under new legislation to work with schools direct and for them to supply information with regard to young people. EONI plans to visit all post primary schools across NI with students in the target 17-18 age base. EONI will also contact young people directly based on the information to be provided by Department of Work and Pensions on young people reaching age 17.

In relation to the impact and outcome with regard to people with disabilities, EONI website was redesigned during 2007 to make it more accessible to users with disabilities. A portable hearing loop was acquired for HQ reception, disabled toilet facilities were installed in Newtownards & Omagh area offices and a chair-lift in

Newtownards Area Office. The most significant improvement was the relocation of the Ballymoney area office to Ballymena in June 2006; this office is fully accessible for customers and staff with disabilities. The registration form and notes were also translated into Braille, audio tape and daisy disk, along with the "Blind Persons" absent voting form. EONI took these materials to several outreach events organised by RNIB in order to facilitate those with visual impairments. During September/October 2007 a themed Registration week targeted people with disabilities. All offices were required to make presentations to representative groups to promote registration among those with disabilities.

In relation to ethnic groups, information is available in a range of formats – the electoral registration form and guidance notes has been translated into Irish, Ulster Scots, Portuguese, Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, traditional and simplified Chinese, Russian, Tetum, Romanian, Filipino and Slovak, and during the last canvass flash cards were translated into numerous languages to help those from minority ethnic groups understand the registration process when canvassers called at their homes. To assist individuals in registering, the registration form has been completely revised and simplified and is one of the few public sector forms in Northern Ireland to be awarded the Plain English Campaign Crystal Mark for clarity. Staff have also facilitated registration among ethnic groups by attending and helping out at Polish and Romanian elections.

EONI also removed an 18+ age restriction to work at elections when assessing its recruitment policy against the impact of the Age Discrimination regulations. EONI will continue to work towards delivering outcomes for all nine equality categories.

2b) Outline the number of equality scheme related consultation exercises undertaken by your authority over the past five years. Set out the number and percentage related to screening exercises and to EQIAs and indicate the extent that your scheme helped you to engage with external stakeholders.

EONI has carried out 11 Equality scheme related consultation exercise over the past 5 years (See Annex A), comprising:

- Initial screening exercise
- 2 Equality Impact Assessments
- 8 screening exercises

The CEO committed in his Equality Scheme to consult and take account of proposals and that consultation with groups and individuals will begin as early as possible, with a response period of at least eight weeks. There has been a steady decline in the number of responses to consultation exercises during the 5 years. However, regular meetings have been established between the Chief Electoral Officer and a range of representative interest groups including Disability Action, RNID, RNIB and Help the Aged. It is planned to build on this. There was also engagement with local community groups with regard to access to polling stations which presented problems for those with physical disabilities. A significant number of

changes were made to the polling station scheme before the March 2007 election to accommodate voters with disabilities.

2c) Indicate if your list of consultees was amended during the 5 year period and what further steps could be taken to develop your level of engagement and consultation?

The equality stakeholder list has been developed significantly over the 5 year period by including a wider range of consultees, primarily by identifying interested parties in lists circulated within the wider NICS and NIO. It has also been amended periodically at the request of consultees or their families who wish names to be removed. Internal arrangements are in place to review the list eg removal of MLAs no longer in office. EONI is currently attempting to put in place an electronic list of stakeholder email addresses to improve efficiency of the consultation process.

2d) To what extent did your authority consult directly with directly affected individuals as well as with representative groups, particularly in relation to young people and those with learning disabilities, and was this sufficient?

Senior Management and Area Electoral Office consult directly with individuals, where these are known, as well as with representative groups. In 2005-06 there was pro-active engagement with many disability groups prior to and after the 2005 May elections and also with ethnic minority groups and those representing young people in advance of and during the 2005 Canvass period. There is also consultation on all areas of policy and operation with MEPs, MPs and MLAs.

Area Electoral Officers consult with representative groups on the benefits of registration eg, technical college freshers' day organised by RNIB. The electoral registration form and notes were also translated into Braille, audio tape and daisy disk, along with the "Blind Persons" absent voting form. EONI took these materials to several outreach events organised by RNIB in order to facilitate those with visual impairments.

3. The authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

3a) Outline and discuss the number of policies your authority subject to screening over the past five years, setting out the number and percentage of 'policies screened in' on the basis of equality considerations and the percentage 'screened in' on the basis of the good relations duty.

During the past 5 years 37 Policies have been subject to screening.

Initially, 3 had been screened in:

- Polling Station Scheme
- Preparing and Maintaining Electoral Register
- IT system

However, a new screening exercise was undertaken to consider the full implications and developments connected with EONI's new IT system which could not have been envisaged when the systems were implemented from 2002 onwards. The response date for the consultation on the re-screening exercise was 9 June 2006. The

screening process disclosed no adverse differential impact on individuals in any of the section 75 groups. None of those consulted disagreed with this assessment. Accordingly it is not now considered that an EQIA is necessary and the Policy was therefore screened out.

3b) To what extent did your authority's consideration of the screening criteria **not** identify equal opportunity implications on any of s75 categories, but for which consultees then highlighted problems?

Following the screening process, consultees have highlighted equal opportunity implications mainly in relation to the wording of various policies and EONI has altered text accordingly. However, in situations where consultees believe that the policy could have the potential to adversely impact on some of the 9 Section 75 categories further consultation with the particular organization has revised existing policy eg, clarification in relation to the impact on people with disabilities.

3c) Outline over the past five years how many EQIAs your authority commenced as a result of i) initial screening and ii) as a result of screening new/revised policies subsequently, and discuss the extent that your authority has become more effective at identifying equality of opportunity dimensions in its policies.

EONI have carried out two equality impact assessments as a result of initial screening. Any new policies subsequently screened following the initial exercise have been predominantly internal HR policies which incorporates equality of opportunity as priority in their developmental stage.

3d) Outline over the past five year period the percentage of your authority's initial EQIA timetable that reached i) stage 6 of the EQIA process i.e. decision making, and ii) stage 7 of the EQIA process i.e. annual monitoring & publication of results, and indicate the extent that your authority has become more effective at progressing EQIAs.

Both functions screened in for EQIA are at stage 7 of the EQIA process.

4. The authority's arrangements for monitoring any adverse impact of policies adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

4a) To what extent were sufficient arrangements put in place to collect data relating to the nine equality categories to monitor the impact of policies and what could your authority do in future to develop monitoring arrangements?

Arrangements have been put in place to gather quantitative data by the Electoral Commission, and Census data as published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) on its website. Qualitative data has been gathered through Electoral Commission reports and surveys; comments on the registration function by Area Electoral Officers; input from EONI Headquarters staff; Mencap; Disability Action; RNIB; RNID; political parties; the media; political commentators; and individual politicians; internal staff questionnaires. EONI is currently putting in place systems to collect relevant information, which can be used to assess and monitor the impact of our policies and functions on the promotion of equality of opportunity – both in relation to our staff and the services offered by EONI. Information Services provided by the Helpline are currently monitored for age and gender. However, developing data sources for

comparative analysis is difficult given the nature of the information held on the Electoral Register.

External Monitoring

The Electoral Commission, through PWC and other agencies, have conducted a raft of research, both on elections and electoral registration. Their research also covered surveys among staff employed at the poll and counts for recent elections. Some of this material may be used as a basis for future comparative work (e.g. non registration by age, non registration by religion, access for disabled electors at polling stations). At the request of the CEO the Electoral Commission now incorporates, where practicable, the gathering of section 75 statistics in any research undertaken.

Recruitment Monitoring

The EONI Human Resources section, in the latter part of 2007, altered its staff equal opportunities monitoring form - used primarily for recruitment and re-employment monitoring purposes. This form now includes sections on 'Dependents', 'Marital/Family Status' and 'Disability'. The outcomes and participation in recruitment campaigns are also now measured against external benchmarks.

Monitoring the Use of EONI Services

A. EONI works closely with the Electoral Commission during the preparation of any detailed statistical report on the age profile of the

registered electorate and uses the findings to prioritise marketing initiatives.

B. It is not easy for EONI to monitor any of the other section 75 categories in relation to uptake of electoral registration as these types of data are not requested when an individual applies to register (e.g. with/without dependents, religious, sexual orientation, political opinion etc). Even gender is not recorded and it would be very expensive to customise the EROS software – as well as redesign the form – to facilitate this. There are strict provisions in the Representation of the People Acts that prevent the seeking of other than prescribed information.

EONI is currently conducting a sample of approximately 2500 recently received registration forms and will attempt to assess the gender of the applicants. We are doing this through the Area Offices, on a periodic basis, in order to monitor regular take – up of our services by gender. This will enable the different patterns of gender participation in our services to be assessed. There is also the indirect method of monitoring these participants through proxy indicators where, through reviewing postcodes, we can assess the religious and political differences of those who use our registration services.

C. From January 2008, the Area Offices have been recording the gender of callers to their premises, in order to establish office 'footfall' as a section 75 monitoring basis. It was considered unreasonable to

try to monitor any of the other categories through recording office footfall.

D. EONI will consider the possibility of providing a voluntary (section 75) monitoring form for potential registrants. This would be along the lines of the recruitment monitoring form and could be either

- sent out to a random sample of registered electors,
- given out at Area Offices counters, or
- sent out by the Helpline with all form requests to over a designated period.

This would enable some form of comparison against population datasets to assess equality of opportunity to use EONI services.

Other Future Monitoring

In addition to working with the Electoral Commission to obtain information through surveys, it is also possible to undertake some types of monitoring through focus groups set up by the Commission, or their agents, in relation to registration or elections. EONI will consider devising a short monitoring questionnaire for our specific purposes - as well as carrying out an evaluation of each registration 'event', such a questionnaire could be offered on a voluntary basis to all participants.

It is imperative that EONI is able to review its progress with regard to all aspects of its current equality scheme, and effective data collected through robust monitoring procedures is essential in this regard. Only a limited amount of data collection was possible in the first five years of the scheme but this must be enhanced considerably for monitoring purposes over the duration of our next, revised, equality scheme.

5. The authority's arrangements for publishing the results of equality impact assessments and of monitoring any adverse impact of policies adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

5a) Indicate the number of reports published outlining the results of EQIAs and monitoring over the past five years, and outline what your authority could do in future in relation to improving the publication of EQIA results and monitoring.

Two reports have been published as a result of equality impact assessments through Press Notices and put on EONI website. The CEO has made a commitment to implement a strategy for monitoring the use of our services by the full range of section 75 categories. .

For section 75 purposes EONI needs to monitor the adverse impact of policies. This type of monitoring or any other monitoring which we may instigate on the use of our services by Section 75 categories, must be reasonable in relation to the size and nature of EONI. EONI aims to put in place systems to collect relevant information, which can be used to assess and monitor the impact of our policies and functions on the promotion of equality of opportunity – both in relation

to our staff and the services offered by EONI. Work has commenced on taking forward monitoring proposals to the Management Board.

All future monitoring reports will be published on EONI website.

6. A commitment that in making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted by it, that the public authority shall take into account any equality impact assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy.

6a) In terms of the number of EQIAs that reached stage 6 i.e. decision making, to what extent were mitigation measures and alternative policies adopted?

The two EQIAs which reached Stage 6 were those on

1. The Northern Ireland Polling Station Scheme in 2004
2. The Function of Preparing and Maintaining and Accurate Electoral Register in 2005.

With regard to (1) EONI had identified wheelchair users and older people as the two Section 75 groups that might suffer a significant adverse, differential impact on access to polling stations. Seventy-six polling stations had been identified to establish if suitable alternative locations could be found or the owners of the premises pressed to provide improved access arrangements.

In response to the EQIA, five bodies made a substantive response indicting some adverse impact and all proposed mitigation measures.

The EQIA on the accurate electoral register (2) has been dealt with elsewhere in this Report. There were seven substantive replies to the EQIA, of which six highlighted some adverse impact. EONI made an individual response to each submission indicating how it might address the concerns which had been raised. Many of these related to the annual canvass, whether or not it should continue and how to aid electors from the section 75 groups to get on the electoral register. EONI was willing to accept and adopt many of the proposed mitigation measures but was unable to alter policies which were being introduced through legislation.

6b) To what extent did consideration of EQIAs and consultations contribute to a change in policy, as opposed to policy decisions which would probably have been made in any event by your authority?

With regard to the polling station EQIA, EONI is obliged by legislation to provide a polling station suitable for voting in person by each elector. Thus policy changes relate only to the selection of premises.

EONI is acutely aware of all access difficulties at each station, as these are assessed in advance of each election, and attempts to mitigate these by providing alternative locations where possible, identifying other more accessible entrances to premises, ensuring staff are on hand to assist voters with disabilities and that there is appropriate signage at all such premises. Under legislation the location of all polling stations is reviewed every four years and this,

with the practical limitations of availability, limits EONI's ability to provide polling stations at a wider variety of venues.

One significant change in procedure as a result of the EQIA, however, was that the CEO now actively enlists the assistance of groups representing older people and voters with disabilities in assessing the suitability of current polling stations and their possible replacements.

As stated in 6A above, the EQIA on registration (2) did not directly bring about policy changes. However the responses received did encourage EONI to reconsider many of the means by which it planned to implement those policies e.g. the EQIA effectively provided a vehicle for consultation with the key stakeholders in the registration process and many of the suggestions were implemented such as introductions of textphone, translation of forms into a variety of languages, more focused targeting of under registered groups such as young people.

In the longer term, the EQIA initiated discussions about voting by persons with the learning disabilities and this facility will be introduced in Northern Ireland later in 2008 – a significant policy change expedited by the EQIA.

7. The authority's arrangements for training staff on issues relevant to the duties.

7a) To what extent were sufficient arrangements put in place to develop and deliver a training programme in accordance with scheme commitments?

The CEO, in his Equality Scheme, made a commitment over the 5 years period to ensure that all EONI staff would receive a programme of relevant communication and training on the section 75 obligations. The programme and arrangements put in place to deliver a training programme in accordance with scheme commitments including:

- A training plan for all EONI staff
- Raising awareness of anti-discrimination legislation in NI
- Providing staff involved in screening of policies, consultation and EQIAs with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively
- Providing staff who deal with complaints with the necessary skills to investigate and monitor complaints effectively
- To evaluate the extent to which training programmes have acquired the necessary skills to achieve section 75 training objectives.

7b) Have all staff received awareness training and what could your authority do in future to deliver an effective training programme?

Equality awareness training has been carried out as an integral part of the induction process for new staff. A Learning and Development Policy was agreed with NIPSA during 2006/07 which has formalised training procedures to ensure effective delivery of a training plan

which include equality training. This Policy was screened for adverse impact and subject to a consultation period. The benefits of training have been detailed in the annual progress reports to the Equality Commission and EONI will continue to develop an annual training plan to ensure equality training is provided to the appropriate members of staff, including poll staff.

8. The authority's arrangements for ensuring and assessing public access to information and to services provided by the authority.

8a) To what extent were sufficient arrangements put in place to ensure and assess public access to information and to services provided by the authority?

Initially, the publication of equality documentation on EONI's website was announced by means of a Press Notice which was placed in advertisements in regional papers. Arrangements for access to information and services provided by EONI are now mainly available through our website and various marketing initiatives.

Information is available on request in alternative formats such as large print, Braille, disc and audio in minority languages. During 2005 the EONI installed a range of IT developments to provide enhanced communications for the visually and aurally impaired including a telephone/information service with a central enquiry text phone facility and induction loops at all Area Electoral Office public counters.

Recently EONI website was redesigned to make it more accessible to users with disabilities. A portable hearing loop was acquired for HQ reception, disabled toilet facilities were installed in Newtownards & Omagh area offices, a chair-lift in Newtownards Area Office and an upgrade of reception area in the Londonderry Office to meet counter requirement for wheelchair users. The most significant improvement was the relocation of the Ballymoney area office to Ballymena in June 2006; this office is fully accessible for customers and staff with disabilities. The registration form and guidance notes were translated into numerous languages to help those from minority groups understand the registration process and into Braille, audio tape and daisy disk, along with the "Blind Persons" absent voting form – which were used at outreach events organised by RNIB in order to facilitate those with visual impairments. In order to make our service more accessible to people who are profoundly deaf or speech impaired EONI are now accepting calls via Typetalk. This is a service provided by The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) which enables people who use textphones to relay their call via a Typetalk Operator who translates the text into speech and vice versa.

A number of refurbishments are also currently underway in HQ including upgrading the lift for people with disabilities (speech unit, auto dialer, guard rail), installing an automatic front entrance door and lowering the level of access buzzers throughout the building.

9. The authority's timetable for measures proposed in the scheme.

9a) Outline the extent to which measures set out in the original timetable have been implemented. Any detailed information should be included as an appendix to the report.

EONI's timetable (Annex B) has largely been met. Progress has been reported to the Management Board through EONI's Section 75 Equality Officer. A Disability Action Plan, in accordance with section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, has been completed.

9b) If your authority was to be reconstituted in the next five years what would be the main scheme actions/equality considerations that an incoming authority should address? Any detailed information should be included as an appendix to the report.

There are no plans for any such reconstitution which would require primary Westminster legislation. The knowledge transfer issues would be addressed in the course of the discussions on any such reconstitution.

10. Details of how the scheme will be published.

10a) Were scheme commitments in this section delivered and what evidence supports this view?

(Enter text below)

EONI's Equality Scheme stated that following approval it would be available on our website and in accessible formats on request. EONI issued a press statement, placed a prominent advertisement in the local press and sent copies of the Scheme to stakeholders.

11. The authority's arrangements for dealing with complaints arising from a failure to comply with the scheme.

11a) Outline the number and nature of complaints received by your authority, and what your authority could do in future to develop its complaints handling process and learn from complaints.

EONI has received no complaints in relation to it's discharge of Section 75 duties during the 5 year review period.

12. A commitment to conducting a review of the scheme within five years of its submission to the Equality Commission and to forwarding a report of this review to the Equality Commission.

12a) What has been your authority's experience of conducting this review? To what extent has the Commission's guidance been useful in undertaking the review?

EONI has considered this review helpful in measuring the effectiveness of the currently equality scheme and will consider further action required during the next 5 years. Based on the template provided by the Equality Commission and self-assessments completed through the annual progress reporting, the completion of the 5 year review was relatively straightforward.

Policy Consultation (June 2003 – June 2008)	Status/Comments
Corporate Policies	
Initial Screening Exercise	Year 1 – Public Consultation. Equality impact assessments to be undertaken as the screening process concluded that the polling station scheme and the function of preparing and maintaining an accurate electoral register was likely to have a differential impact on particular groups within the Section 75 categories.
EQIA – Polling Scheme	Screened In. EQIA completed. Final report published.
EQIA – Electoral Register	Screened In. EQIA completed. Final report published.
Gifts & Hospitality	Screened out. Joint stakeholder consultation exercise with Fraud & Response Plan and Whistleblowing Policies – September 2006. The screening process concluded that the proposed policies were not likely to have a differential impact on any of the groups within the Section 75 categories and that a full EQIA was not required.
Fraud & Response Plan	Screened out as above.
Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing)	Screened out as above.
Internal HR Policies	
Harassment & Bullying	Screened out. Joint stakeholder consultation exercise with Learning

	and Development Policy – July 2006. The screening process concluded that the proposed policies were not likely to have a differential impact on any of the groups within the Section 75 categories and that a full EQIA was not required.
Learning and Development	Screened out as above.
Car Parking Policy	Screened out. Stakeholder consultation exercise carried out in November 2007. The screening process concluded that the proposed policy was not likely to have a differential impact on any of the groups within the Section 75 categories and that a full EQIA was not required.
Guidance on Dealing with Unacceptable Behaviour	Screened out. Stakeholder consultation exercise carried out in January 2008. The screening process concluded that the proposed policy was not likely to have a differential impact on any of the groups within the Section 75 categories and that a full EQIA was not required.

TIMETABLE (Extract from Equality Scheme)

11.1 The following timetable outlines those measures under this Scheme that the Chief Electoral Officer has already put in place for completion during the five years following the Submission of this Scheme for approval. A fully comprehensive timetable will be compiled after screening of all present policies, powers, functions and duties; consultation on the outcome of the screening exercise; and identification of the required equality impact assessments have been completed. This comprehensive timetable will then be submitted to the Equality Commission and made publicly available.

Year 1: 1 April 2002 – 31 March 2003

- Complete screening exercise, including public consultation, and identify equality impact assessments.
- Conduct and evaluate training.
- Issue comprehensive Equality Scheme timetable.
- Carry out data and information availability audit.
- Develop systems for: information collection (quantitative and qualitative); information dissemination; effective consultation; accessibility to information; and screening new policies, powers, functions and duties.
- Conduct pilot equality impact assessments.
- Screen any new policies, powers, functions and duties.
- Prepare 1st Annual Report.

Year 2: 1 April 2003 – 31 March 2004

- Publish 1st Annual Report.
- Continue training programme.
- Carry out scheduled equality impact assessments.

- Monitor operation of the Scheme.
- Screen any new policies, powers, functions and duties.
- Prepare 2nd Annual Report.

Year 3: 1 April 2004 – 31 March 2005

- Publish 2nd Annual Report
- Induction training for new staff.
- Carry out scheduled equality impact assessments.
- Monitor operation of the Scheme.
- Screen any new policies, powers, duties and functions.
- Prepare 3rd Annual Report.

Year 4: 1 April 2005 – 31 March 2006

- Publish 3rd Annual Report
- Induction training for new staff.
- Carry out scheduled equality impact assessments.
- Monitor operation of the Scheme.
- Screen any new policies, powers, duties and functions.
- Prepare 4th Annual Report.

Year 5: 1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007

- Publish 4th Annual Report
- Carry out remaining equality impact assessments, if any.
- Screen any new policies, powers, duties and functions.
- Carry out major 5 year review of the operation and effectiveness of the Scheme in promoting equality of opportunity and good relations.
- Publish Review Report.

June 2003.