

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Authority Annual Progress Report 2006 - 2007

This report template includes a number of self assessment questions regarding implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties from **1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007**. Please enter information at the relevant part of each section and ensure that it is submitted electronically (by completing this template) and in writing, with a signed cover letter from the Chief Executive or, in his/her absence, the Deputy Chief Executive to the Commission by **31 August 2007**.

Name of public authority

Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association

Equality Officer

David McCallum
Murray House
Murray Street
Belfast
BT1 6DN

Executive Summary

- What were the key policy/service developments made by the authority during this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations?

Co-Ownership Housing in accordance with the joint approach with the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations Limited (NIFHA) made available the first Equality Impact Assessments in respect of Access and Communication policies to consultee groups. A twelve week period of consultation commenced 23rd June 2006 and in September 2006 Co-Ownership produced and submitted to the Equality Commission an Annual Progress Report for the year April 2005 to March 2006.

Co-Ownership has put in place processes to enable non-English speakers and the visually and hearing impaired to gain fair and equal access to information appropriate to their needs. The initiatives comply with the equality legislation and good practice standards. The Communication Department has introduced a number of services including Interpreter, Translator, Sign Language and textDirect. Furthermore the Co-Ownership website is speech enabled with BrowseAloud and is W3C-WAI compliant. Information leaflets, handouts and guidelines are available to view and download on our website www.co-ownership.org. Co-Ownership Housing will endeavour to ensure as much as possible that no group will be disadvantaged in respect of access to the Co-Ownership scheme.

NIFHA collated feedback from consultees responding to year 1 Impact Assessments Reports on Access and Communication and Complaints. The organisations that provided feedback were ANIMATE, Coalition on Sexual Orientation (COSO), Help the Aged, Disability Action and the Equality Commission. The comments made by the consultees were considered and Co-Ownership Housing reviewed the accessibility criteria to ensure that users gain fair and equal access to information appropriate to their particular needs.

Co-Ownership Housing arranged an accessibility awareness presentation to highlight for staff the processes and mechanism in place supporting the organisations communication policy. The presentation emphasised good practice standards and examined situations that staff may encounter outlining the appropriate solutions in respect of specific circumstances. The Communications Officer held two awareness seminars and a representative from the RNID Tynetalk organisation held a further two presentations in November 2006, illustrating the need for the Tynetalk services and also demonstrated advantages and usage to staff. The need for feedback in respect of monitoring and evaluating purposes was emphasised and all staff are encouraged to report circumstances they encounter in order to assess situations and improve standards.

Co-Ownership Housing continues to conduct equality impact assessments in respect of its Housing Management policies in accordance with our commitments agreed with the Equality Commission. NIFHA held a pre-consultation exercise with consultees during the period 12th March 07 – 19th March 2007.

The Equality Team commenced work towards the development of an effective Disability Action Plan in accordance with Section 49A and 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006) highlighting Co-Ownership Housing's proposals to fulfill the disability duties in relation to its function.

- What are the 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?

Co-Ownership Housing is progressing with company policies and relevant documentation in consideration of the Equality (Age) Regulation (Northern Ireland) 2006 Order.

We have researched the legislation and formulated an action plan to comply with regulations. Application forms have been amended to reflect the legislation requirements and we have revised processes to ensure that all aspects of recruitment and selection including advertising, short listing, promotion and references will be free from age discrimination.

A Disability Action Plan has been devised by Co-Ownership Housing, reflecting our commitment under the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons and to also encourage participation of disabled persons in public life. Co-Ownership Housing intends to hold training seminars to be attended by all staff members during the year in order to raise awareness in respect of our obligations and duties.

Co-Ownership Housing will endeavor to continually revise and update its computer system and to collect data for information, research and monitoring purposes in respect of section 75.

The Housing Management Equality Impact Assessment will be completed in 2007 and work will commence on assessing Human Resources and Charging Policies during the year 2007/2008.

Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

- Outline evidence of progress made in developing and meeting equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans during 2006-07.

Please see appendix 1.

Section 2: Screening

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

Title of policy subject to screening	Was the Full Screening Report or the Result of initial screening issued for consultation? Please enter F or R	Was initial screening decision changed following consultation? Yes/No	Is policy being subject to EQIA? Yes/No? If yes indicate year for assessment.
Housing Management	Full	No	06/07

Section 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- Provide an update of policies subject to EQIA during 2006/07, stage 7 EQIA monitoring activities and an indicative EQIA timetable for 2007-08.

EQIA Timetable – April 2006 - March 2007

Title of Policy EQIA	EQIA Stage at end March 07 (Steps 1-6)	Outline adjustments to policy intended to benefit individuals, and the relevant equality & good relations categories due to be affected.
Housing management	4	No adjustments required to policy

Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities April 2006- March 2007

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
Access & Communications	N/A	N/A
Complaints	N/A	N/A

2007-08 EQIA Time-table

Title of EQIAs due to be commenced during April 2007 – March 2008	Existing or New policy?	Please indicate expected timescale of Decision Making stage i.e. Stage 6
Human Resources	Existing	07/08
Charging Policies	Existing	07/08

- Where the EQIA timetable for 2006/07 (as detailed in the previous annual section 75 progress report to the Commission) has not been met, please provide details of the factors responsible for delay and details of the timetable for re-scheduling the EQIA/s in question.

N/A

Section 4: Training

- Outline training provision during the year associated with the section 75 Duties/Equality Scheme requirements including types of training provision, numbers attending, and conclusions from any training evaluations.

Various training courses associated with the section 75 duties / Equality Scheme requirements have been provided by the organisation and are outlined below.

EQIA Orientations

Over the course of the year, the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) arranged EQIA workshops for its members setting out what is required of each organisation. Each of the 4 workshops organised were attended by at least 2 of the 8 members of our Equality Team.

Equality Impact Assessments

A practical workshop which offered training in relation to impact assessments in respect of Housing Management policies was attended by 2 members of the Equality Team on the 29th August 2006.

Additionally on the 25th April 2007 staff attended a meeting to review consultation work and highlight Co-Ownership Housing's commitment to the process, and to outline the timetable for the year 2 equality impact assessments.

Equality in Housing

2 members of the Equality Team attended a training seminar concerning Equality in Housing arranged by the Housing Rights Service on the 12th October 2006. The training provided an overview of Equality Legislation in N.I. and its impact upon Housing, emphasising the importance of the need to develop clear Equality Policies within working practices.

Disability Action

A Disability Action awareness seminar took place on 27th March 2007 organised by the Chief Executives' Forum outlining the new responsibilities that public sector employers now have to undertake as a result of new legislation. This session was attended by 2 members of the Equality Team.

Members of the Equality Team also attended a session organised by NIFHA on 17th April 07 giving guidance on preparing Disability Action Plans.

Accessibility Awareness

2 Accessibility Awareness training sessions took place within the organisation. The first session was presented by the Communications Officer and outlined how to deal with situations involving limited English speakers and people with sight and hearing difficulties. The second session was presented by a member of RNID Typetalk, which is an interpreter service set up to help members of the aforementioned groups to communicate. All Staff members were invited to both sessions.

Section 5: Communication

- Outline how the authority communicated progress on delivery of the statutory duties during the year and evidence of the impact/success of such activities.

Accessibility awareness presentations were arranged, highlighting the processes and mechanisms supporting the organisation's communication policy. The presentation

emphasised good practice standards and examined situations that staff may encounter outlining the appropriate solutions in respect of specific circumstances.

The Communications Officer held two presentations on 9th November 2006 and a representative from the RNID Type Talk organisation held a further two seminars at the Association's office on 15th November 2006. The representative illustrated the need for the Type Talk service, demonstrating advantages and usage which was received positively by staff.

Both seminars were very successful and proved to be very useful methods of internal communication as they give staff the opportunity to discuss ideas and share experiences.

Our publications illustrate that they are available in alternative formats on request and out text phone user number has been added.

We have used the 'Equality' page of our website as a tool to communicate our progress and the Equality Scheme is available to download.

Quarterly equality updates are issued to the governance committee and Board. The Updates are available for all staff.

Co-Ownership provides a home visit service on request to applicants and leaseholders and this is communicated by our staff, correspondence and literature.

Section 6: Data Collection & Analysis

- Outline any systems that were established during the year to supplement available statistical and qualitative research.
- Outline any research undertaken/commissioned to obtain information on the needs and experiences of individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75.

Co-Ownership Housing continues to improve personnel software to collect and collate data in relation to the nine categories under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. Annual monitoring returns to the Equality Commission are now processed electronically.

Co-Ownership Housing's internal database systems have also been upgraded to enable the production of better statistical information.

Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

- Detail any initiatives/steps taken during the year to improve access to services including provision of information in accessible formats.

We endeavour to ensure as much as possible that no group will be disadvantaged in respect to access to the Co-Ownership Scheme. We have put in place enhanced

processes to enable non English speakers, and the visually and hearing impaired, to gain fair and equal access to information appropriate to their needs.

To this end the Communications Department has arranged Interpreter and Translator facilities with Language Line, together with Type Talk for text phone users. Sign Language and TextDirect service is also available.

The Co-Ownership website is speech enabled with BrowseAloud and is W3C-WAI compliant with information leaflets, handouts and guidelines available to view and download on the website www.co-ownership.org.

Our 'Key to affording your home' information leaflet was produced on request in 4 languages other than English during the year: Portuguese, Cantonese, Polish and Lithuanian.

Posters were publicly displayed in reception to show the use of TypeTalk and Language Line.

Section 8: Complaints

Identify the number of Section 75 related complaints:

- received by the authority;
- resolved by the authority (including how this achieved);
- which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;
- which were referred to the Equality Commission.

No complaints were received by Co-Ownership Housing during the period April 06 to March 07.

Section 9: Consultation and Engagement

- Provide details of the measures taken to enhance the level of engagement with individuals and representative groups during the year.

In accordance with the joint approach with the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA), Co-Ownership Housing completed equality impact assessments in respect of Access and Communication and Complaints policies in 2005/2006, which were made available to consultee groups. A twelve week period of formal consultation commenced on the 23rd June and closed 15th September 2006. NIFHA collated and collected feedback from consultees who responded to year one impact assessment reports. The organisations which provided feedback were ANIMATE, Coalition and Sexual Orientation (COSO), Help the Aged, Disability Action and the Equality Commission. Co-Ownership Housing's Equality Team considered the comments made by the consultees and reviewed the accessibility criteria to ensure that users gained fair and equal access appropriate to their needs.

NIFHA conducted a pre-consultation exercise in order to assess the impact of the Housing Management and Maintenance Policies on the section 75 equality categories.

The document's aim was to provide details in order to identify the priorities for the Equality Impact Assessments on Housing Management and Maintenance.

The aim is to give greater focus to the EQIA process and enabling a more effective assessment of the impact of the Housing Management and Maintenance policies and feedback was provided in May 2007. The information is currently being used in the development of the EQIA reports.

Co-Ownership Housing is participating in a collaborative approach alongside NIFHA to progress work in the development of a Disability Action Plan. An eight week consultation period began on the 27th April 2007 and following consultee responses Co-Ownership Housing will progress the plan and submit it to the Equality Commission by the 30th June 2007.

Co-Ownership Housing has also written to the following groups, however has received no response as yet.

- Praxis
- The Cedar Foundation (Belfast & Ballymena)
- PHAB
- Ulster Supported Limited (USEL)

Section 10: The Good Relations Duty

- Provide details of additional steps taken to implement or progress the good relations duty during the year. Please indicate any findings or expected outcomes from this work.

Co-Ownership Housing has delivered a housing service against a set of core principles of 'fairness and equity' since its inception in 1978. In developing our Corporate Strategy, objectives and performance indicators are agreed in the context of this core principle and in compliance of section 75.

Section 11: Additional Comments

- Please provide any additional information/comments

We have encountered time constraints and cost implications throughout the year against competing day to day priorities, however Co-Ownership Housing maintains its dedication to the core principles of equality throughout the organisation and is fully committed to its obligations under section 75 Northern Ireland Act.

Appendix 1

Area of Implementation	Element	Performance Indicator	Milestone
Communication	Publication of Equality Scheme	Scheme to be published after approval from the Equality Commission Summary of Scheme to be developed and made available Scheme to be made available in accessible formats on request Scheme to be published on website	10/05 11/05 ongoing 12/05
	Dissemination to key stakeholders	Copy of Scheme to be made available to all staff Copy of Scheme mailed to all those consulted on the Scheme, and to others on request Press Release to the media informing them of the publication of the Equality Scheme	10/05 10/05 10/05 or when all HA schemes are approved
Access	Review of Access to Information and Services	To conduct a review within one year of the implementation of the Scheme covering all aspects of access to information and services, and produce report making recommendations To consult on review with key stakeholders Produce action plan for acting on review recommendations Implementation of action plan begins Carry out action plan to meet performance indicator targets	10/06 06/07 07/07 ongoing ongoing
Complaints	Complaints	To respond to any complaints of non-compliance within one month of complaint being made To report on complaints made on an annual basis to the Equality Commission as part of annual report	ongoing annually in July
Housing Management Policy	Provision of an efficient, effective and equitable Housing Management Service	To adhere to all provisions outlined in the Co-Ownership Sublease. To respond to any complaints of non-compliance within one month of complaint being made	ongoing annually in July