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**PRESS RELEASE**

## **Commission Supports Foyle Pride**

The Equality Commission congratulates Foyle Pride on hosting its first ever parade in Derry-Londonderry as part of this year's annual Foyle Pride Festival. The event takes place on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> August, from the Duke Street Railway Station to the Guildhall. Chief Commissioner Bob Collins commented, "Pride is an opportunity for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people to celebrate their sexuality through a festival of arts and culture. We all know, however, that there are still too many instances in our society of homophobic prejudice and even physical assault. Violence has always been contrary to the criminal law, and this has been recently strengthened where "hate crimes" are involved. It is only in the past decade, however, that people were given any legal protection against discrimination on grounds of their sexuality. In 2003 equality legislation was introduced covering unfair treatment at work, in training and in further education and in 2006 this was extended to the provision of goods, facilities and services."

"The law now requires that gay, lesbian and bisexual people are afforded the equality of treatment, and the respect, due to every human being. We cannot claim to respect people's dignity while tolerating discrimination against them and it is through the implementation of these laws that we can demonstrate our determination, as a society, to reject prejudice, hostility and unfair treatment of people simply on grounds of their sexual orientation."

As with other groups protected by the equality legislation, many of the cases that came up were brought by people who claimed they were subject to unfair treatment or harassment at work. Some of the typical problems faced by gay, lesbian and bisexual people in their everyday lives included gay or lesbian employees being subjected to foul and abusive remarks, being made the butt of sexually explicit 'jokes'. On occasion, people found their complaints about such behaviour were not handled properly or even

that they were disadvantaged as a result. Settlements of such cases have been costly for employers, in terms of compensation payments and have succeeded in changing working conditions for others in many workplaces.

“No-one has to put up with insulting or hurtful behaviour because of their sexual orientation, in work or in access to services.” Bob Collins said. “I want to take the opportunity afforded by this week of Pride events to remind lesbian, gay and bisexual people that they have the right to challenge unfair treatment and that they can confidently assert their rights at work and in society. People who feel they have been discriminated against on the grounds of their sexuality can contact our enquiry line on 028 90 890 890 for free and confidential advice.”

**ENDS**

Notes

### **1. The Law**

*The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003 (the SO Regs 03) make it unlawful for employers and others to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation in the areas of employment, vocational training and further and higher education.*

*The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006 (the SO Regs 06) extend the protection against discrimination to the provision of goods, facilities and services, the management and disposal of land or premises and the provision of education in schools.*

### **2. Equality Commission legal statistics**

*In the year ended 31 March 2010, the Equality Commission had 42 enquiries about sexual orientation discrimination, about 1.3% of all enquiries that year. Of these, almost 60% were to do with the workplace.*