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PRESS RELEASE

Settlement achieved in homophobic hate crime case

Vincent Creelan and David McCauley, a gay couple, have achieved a settlement in a case they brought with the assistance of the Equality Commission against the Chief Constable of the PSNI.

The claimants were subject to regular attacks on their home and were most distressed that the PSNI did not take reasonable steps to prevent further attacks. They brought proceedings in the County Court alleging unlawful discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, harassment and victimization, and claiming damages for injury to their feelings.

The case was settled at Laganside County Court in Belfast on Monday 18 June 2012. The PSNI agreed to pay each of the two claimants, without admission of liability, £5,000 damages plus costs. The Chief Constable also affirmed his commitment to equality legislation in Northern Ireland and has instituted a number of improvements in the handling of all hate incidents. In particular, the PSNI confirmed that awareness and training has been made a priority in Newtownards and that all police officers should be made aware of the need to treat these crimes seriously and to deal with persons who report hate crime, including homophobic hate crime, in a sensitive and understanding manner.

Mr Creelan said, "I'm now looking forward to a change in the way police deal with hate crimes and hope that they have learned their lesson on the way they treat people from minority backgrounds, whether that is gay people or those with a disability or of different faiths. I feel that we didn't receive equal treatment when we reported incidents at our home and as an ex-police officer I knew our home was being singled out in a hate crime

as no one else's home was being targeted. Nobody was taking statements and nobody had any explanation."

Eileen Lavery, Head of Advice and Compliance at the Equality Commission, said, "Hate crime is an issue of real concern to the Commission and we supported this case because it raised important issues about the adequacy and effectiveness of the policing service to victims of hate crime. The PSNI has acknowledged the shortfalls and has already made a substantial start on redressing that situation.

"The law in Northern Ireland protects people against hate crime on a number of grounds, including sexual orientation. Anyone who believes they have been subjected to such a crime has the right to complain about it and to receive fair treatment from the police in doing so."

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Note to editor: background

Vincent Creelan and David McCauley are a same-sex couple living together in Newtownards. They contended that they had suffered a series of frequent homophobic attacks, such as stone throwing, egg throwing and damage to vehicles and property, from August 2007 to October 2008. Mr Creelan and Mr McCauley kept records and reported every incident to police. They alleged that the police repeatedly failed to provide the service expected of them and that the police investigation fell short of the standards set for the investigation of hate crime, including homophobic hate crime.