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PRESS RELEASE

Equality Commission Marks Twenty Five Years of Pride

Speaking in the week of the twenty fifth Belfast Pride festival, Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, said that “the last quarter of a century has seen many positive changes for lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people, in attitudes and in law, but we still have some way to go before all are afforded the equality of treatment, and the respect, to which every human being is entitled.”

Dr. Wardlow said that one of the outstanding issues remains the need for Government to have a robust, outcome focused, and comprehensive Sexual Orientation Strategy, which would send a strong statement of their commitment to promoting equality for LGB people in Northern Ireland. The rights of transgender people also need to be more effectively addressed through the Executive’s Gender Strategy.

He continued: “The Commission believes an effective Sexual Orientation Strategy could ensure focused effort to tackle prejudicial attitudes and behaviours - including hate crime, harassment inside and outside the workplace, and homophobic bullying in schools; could set out clear actions to promote positive attitudes towards LGB individuals and to raise awareness of the rights of LGB people, both amongst LGB people themselves and amongst those with responsibilities under the sexual orientation equality legislation.”

In responding to OFMDFM’s 2014 request for views on what a sexual orientation strategy should include, the Commission also made clear that it should contain a commitment by Departments, their agencies and other statutory authorities to have meaningful engagement with the LGB sector; to implement the strategy; and to give effective leadership in promoting it.

“Public bodies, including government departments and local authorities, as well as private and voluntary sector employers, can make a significant contribution by taking measures to promote positive attitudes towards their LGB employees, office holders and ensuring they provide full equality of treatment for their customers,” Dr Wardlow said.

“The Commission will continue to raise concerns with Government about the delay in progressing a consultation on a full draft Sexual Orientation Strategy,” he said. “The Commission will also continue to highlight how Government can advance equality for

Trans individuals, including via the Gender Equality Strategy. Everyone has the right to lead a life free from discrimination, abuse or harassment. The Commission will continue to work to make that aspiration a reality.”

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS:

In 2013, The Commission set out a range of priority areas for sexual orientation equality. Three key areas require specific strategic action:

- tackling prejudicial attitudes and behaviours specifically homophobic hate crimes, harassment both inside and outside workplace and homophobia in schools
- promoting positive attitudes and
- raising awareness of rights of LGB people.

For full details, download our policy position document: [‘Promoting Sexual Orientation Equality - Priorities and Recommendations’](#) (*pdf, 2013*)

The Commission continues to call on the Northern Ireland Executive to deliver a robust and comprehensive sexual orientation strategy. Read our [response to OFMDFM’s consultation questionnaire on sexual orientation strategy](#) (*pdf, 2014*)