

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

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## PRESS RELEASE

### Local government drive for diversity and inclusion



Councils in Northern Ireland are being asked to sign up to five new principles to help them meet their equality and diversity obligations.

Junior Ministers Jennifer McCann MLA and Jonathan Bell MLA launched the Local Government Staff Commission's new Equality and Diversity Framework to an audience of council officers and elected members.

A copy of the Equality and Diversity Framework has been sent to all council chief executives. Jane Morrice, chair of the Equality and Diversity Group and Deputy Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, said at the launch, "I would encourage councils and their leaders to

endorse and sign the Framework document to highlight their commitment to equality and good relations both for their workforce and the people they serve.

“The Framework has been developed in consultation with members of the Equality and Diversity Group over the past year. Each council has appointed a councillor and an officer to champion equality and diversity by driving positive actions and acting as a contact point for issues relating to the Equality and Diversity Framework.

“There are big challenges ahead for local government, with the reform process just around the corner. The Framework is designed to help councils ensure that equality and diversity stay high on the reform agenda.”

Adrian Kerr, Chief Executive, Local Government Staff Commission, speaking at the launch, said, “The five principles of the Framework are aimed at promoting a non-discriminatory environment and ensuring that councils act in a fair, positive and pro-active way. The Diversity Champions in each council will be a key element in spreading the learning via a unique accredited training programme for staff and elected members alike.”

The launch event showcased best practice examples. Ards Borough Council staff talked about their work to develop a transgender strategy; Newtownabbey Borough Council presented their toolkit for mainstreaming equality in local government and Antrim Borough Council spoke on integrating disabled people into their workforce. Fermanagh District Council talked about its employability project for local unemployed people and the Public Health Agency described its work to engage with LGBT staff. Evelyn Collins, Chief Executive, Equality Commission, who chaired the best practice session, welcomed the projects as ‘ground-breaking’, ‘practical’ and ‘focused’.

Dan Robertson, Employers’ Network for Equality and Inclusion, spoke on his research work into unconscious bias in the workplace. His findings suggest that managers try to treat everyone the same and ignore differences such as sex, race, religion, sexuality and bodyweight. However, in reality, more than one in five have biases which were operating, unseen and unintentionally, below the fairness radar of managers.

## Notes to editors

- Local government in Northern Ireland employs around 11,650 people.
- Councils are required to comply with anti-discrimination legislation and Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 (the Act). Section 75 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Act.
- *The Principles of the Equality and Diversity Framework*
  - *Principle 1*: Ensuring we work in a non-discriminatory environment, promote equality, and model best practice in equality and good relations
  - *Principle 2*: Ensuring all our decisions are based on evidence to assess the likely impact of a policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations
  - *Principle 3*: Providing access to services, facilities and information
  - *Principle 4*: Recruiting and employing people fairly
  - *Principle 5*: Responding to and learning from complaints and incidents in a positive and pro-active way.

[Local Government Staff Commission and its work>](#)

[Dan Robertson's research on unconscious bias in the workplace>](#)

*Caption for photo above: Welcoming the Junior Ministers to the Local Government Staff Commission conference are, left to right, Mervyn Rankin, Chairman, Local Government Staff Commission; Evelyn Collins, Chief Executive, Equality Commission; Junior Ministers Jennifer McCann and Jonathan Bell; Jane Morrice, Deputy Chief Commissioner, Equality Commissioner and Chair of the Equality and Diversity Group; Adrian Kerr, Chief Executive, Local Government Staff Commission*