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PRESS RELEASE

Decision on play park name was in breach of Council's Equality Scheme

The Equality Commission has found that Newry and Mourne District Council failed to comply with its own Equality Scheme when deciding to retain the name "The Raymond McCreesh Park" for a Council-owned children's play park in Newry.

The Commission's Investigation has held that the Council's consideration of the issue was "more focussed on process and on maintaining the name of the play park than on paying due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations. There is little evidence that the duty was exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind in the decision making process."

Accordingly, the Commission has made three recommendations to Newry and Mourne District Council.

1. That it review its decision to name the park after Raymond McCreesh, in a transparent manner that takes proper account of the legal obligations to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.
2. That it review its policy on naming Council facilities, in a transparent manner that takes proper account of the legal obligations to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.
3. That the reviews be completed and reported to the Commission within twelve months of receipt of the final Investigation Report, and that a report on progress be made to the Commission with 6 months.

"The Commission cannot, and would not wish to, substitute its view for the decisions made by democratically elected councillors or any other public authority, but we do have a particular role in Northern Ireland in monitoring compliance with the approved Equality

Schemes adopted by public bodies,” Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission said.

“By adopting its Equality Scheme, Newry and Mourne District Council made a public commitment that the impact its policies and decisions might have on equality and good relations would be fully considered. The Commission recognises that the Council has a long-standing commitment to promoting good relations, with a programme of work to support this. However, our investigation has found that little consideration appears to have been given by the Council to the impact its decision in this instance might have on the Protestant/Unionist community or to the damage it might cause to good relations.”

When the decision to name the park “The Raymond McCreesh Park” was initially taken in April 2001, the Council did not have an equality scheme and the process was very limited. In 2009 they started a process, which included an equality impact assessment (EQIA), to reconsider the name following a complaint and also representations to the Council by the Commission. The Council decided on 3 December 2012 to retain the name.

The Commission carried out an investigation into this decision under Paragraph 11 of Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Investigation has held that there was a breach of the Council’s commitment in its Equality Scheme to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across the Section 75 groups and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

View the [full investigation report](#) (pdf)