



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**19 January 2015**

### **‘Expecting Equality’ Investigation Comes to Fermanagh**

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is conducting a formal Investigation under the Sex Discrimination Order (NI) 1976 into the treatment of pregnant workers and mothers in workplaces across Northern Ireland. Members of the Commission’s Investigation Team will be holding one of the first focus group meetings this week in Enniskillen, at the Castle Island Community Centre.

“The investigation will consider the employment experiences of pregnant women and mothers returning to work and identify any barriers to equal treatment,” Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission said. “It will also report on examples of good practice by employers which provide pregnant women and mothers with equality of opportunity in the workplace.”

The most common cause of complaint to the Equality Commission on grounds of gender is from women who feel they have been treated unfairly either when they became pregnant or on their return to work after maternity leave.

“It is important that all employers are aware of the laws governing pregnancy and maternity rights in the workplace, Dr. Wardlow said. “We do extensive work providing advice and guidance on these issues and find that most employers want to know what the law requires and want to make sure they are providing fair treatment and equality of opportunity for all their workers.

“This Investigation will provide us with a wider perspective and a greater depth of knowledge of the issues facing women in the Northern Ireland workplace today. How we accommodate and support the needs of pregnant women and mothers in the workplace is a crucial test of our willingness as a society to enable women - who make up almost 50% of the workforce - to participate in it fully and without disadvantage.”

The Commission has nominated two of its Commissioners - Lyn McBriar and Anna Carragher - as Investigating Commissioners. The Investigation will commence with a number of focus groups so that we can hear the experiences of women who are or were

in employment during all or part of their pregnancy, within the last 5 years. Employers will be invited to participate through round-table discussions to help identify any further advice or support they may need. Women with children under the age of 5 across Northern Ireland will be encouraged to complete an [online](#) survey as part of the investigation. It is expected that the Investigation will proceed throughout this year and that a full report will be published in 2016.