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PRESS RELEASE

Equality Commission Investigation into complaint against former Lisburn City Council

An investigation by the Equality Commission into the former Lisburn City Council's construction work in Lisburn city centre has found that it has breached its Equality Scheme commitments.

The Commission carried out this investigation, under Paragraph 10 Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, following a complaint from a guide dog user that the Council had failed to comply with its Equality Scheme commitments in relation to the implementation of Public Realm construction work in Lisburn city centre.

The Investigation found that Lisburn City Council had breached its Equality Scheme commitments in that it failed to identify the implementation of the works as a policy for the purpose of its equality scheme. It failed to screen it to identify whether it was likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and it failed to consider an equality impact assessment.

The Council also breached its Equality Scheme commitment in that it did not review its decision not to screen despite the complainant's request that it do so, the evidence of his complaint and difficulties and hazards about which the Council became aware as work progressed.

However, the Commission found that the Council did not fail in its duty to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in respect of people with disabilities.

The Commission has made recommendations that the Council, now Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, should

- take steps to improve its policy recognition
- make appropriate connection between complaints and its statutory equality duties
- raise the profile of equality in its procurement contracts and
- observe good practice principles for documenting its equality considerations more thoroughly.

“The complainant was faced with a physical environment which was both unfamiliar to him and changed, with short, or no, notice.” Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner said

“At the time, the Council undertook some work in anticipation of the construction, engaging with the visually impaired community in the planning stages, through the tender and engagement processes, and subsequently. It did, however, place a degree of reliance on reacting to various equality issues as they arose. That was important, but an over-reliance on it effectively deprived visually impaired users of an essential opportunity to be aware ahead of time of issues which might affect them and to put forward their views on these specifically.”

“The findings of this Investigation are relevant to public authorities across Northern Ireland. There is a great deal of renewal and development under way in our towns and city centres, and the construction phase can be long and present particular challenges in balancing the needs of those using the public sphere with the inevitable disruption during construction. It is important that Councils are aware of the impact this can have on people with disabilities and others, and take the right steps, at the right time, to meet their equality obligations” Dr. Wardlow concluded.

- Read the full Investigation report [HERE](#)