

1 June 2018

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Funding decisions should have been informed by equality assessments**

An Equality Commission Investigation has found that the Department for Communities failed to comply with its approved Equality Scheme commitments on screening and equality impact assessment relating to funding decisions for the Líofa Gaeltacht Bursary Scheme for 2017 and the Community Halls Pilot Programme.

The Investigation found that both the Scheme and the Programme should have been treated as policies for the purposes of its equality duties and equality scheme arrangements. Both concern the distribution of public money based on set criteria and award processes and, in both instances, the funding options presented to the Minister for decision should have been informed by an equality assessment against the objectives set for the expenditure.

In respect of the Líofa Gaeltacht Bursary Scheme the Investigation found that, when Department officials made a submission to the Minister in December 2016 for a decision on the options presented, no equality assessment information was included for the Minister's consideration. The Investigation found that the Department failed to comply with its Equality Scheme, in that it did not take into account any equality assessment carried out in relation to the policy.

In respect of the Community Halls Pilot Programme, the Department acknowledged that it did not undertake equality screening before the launch of the Programme in October 2016. It stated that this was due to an administrative error. The Commission found that the Department failed to comply with its Equality Scheme in that it did not screen the Programme at the earliest opportunity and prior to its implementation; nor did it use screening to assess the likely impact of the Programme on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, said: "The purpose of the Section 75 statutory duties, and the arrangements in Equality Schemes for fulfilling those duties, are to ensure that, in the development and implementation of policies, due regard is given to the need to promote equality of opportunity."

"In practice, this means that the Department should have undertaken screening and equality impact assessment at appropriate times to inform the development and decision making on both the Scheme and the Programme. Our Investigation found that this did not happen in either case and the Minister was not furnished with appropriate equality assessment information."

"We have made a number of recommendations which we expect the Department to implement."

“Our recommendations include the need for the Department to take a consistent approach to the identification of policies for the purposes of its Equality Scheme arrangements; and to ensure that decision makers are presented with appropriate information on the equality implications. Any continuation of either funding programme must be informed by equality assessments in the future. We have asked the Department to report on the implementation of the recommendations within six months.

ENDS

### **Notes**

The Investigation was carried out under Paragraph 11 of Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which gives the Equality Commission power to investigate where it has formed a belief that a public authority may have failed to comply with the commitments in its Equality Scheme.

The Investigation Report can be accessed [HERE](#) (pdf, 848kb)