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PRESS RELEASE

Support for equality but doubts about leadership

Nine in every ten people surveyed recognise the benefits of having an equal society in Northern Ireland, only one in five think that public figures show leadership on this issue”, Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland said today.

Dr. Wardlow was speaking as the Commission published the findings of a public opinion survey, carried out on its behalf by Ipsos MORI.

“The survey put a series of statements about equality to 500 people in Northern Ireland, Dr. Wardlow said. “When asked, 90% agreed “that equality and anti-discrimination laws in NI are necessary” and 76% agreed that “equality and anti-discrimination laws in NI should be strengthened”. So it is clear that there is strong support for our equality legislation, and for it to be updated and made more effective where that is necessary.”

“It was striking, however, that the statement which attracted the most emphatic disagreement was that “public figures show leadership on equality matters”. 54% expressed overall disagreement with this and 40% ticked the box for “strongly disagree” - a category which, for most other statements in the survey, rarely got out of single figures.”

“Over the past few years the Commission has been drawing attention, and urging government action, to worrying gaps which have developed between equality laws in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. These include the absence of any protection against discrimination in goods facilities and services on grounds of age, as well as deficiencies in race and sex discrimination laws.”

“We work hard to promote equality of opportunity, in the workplace and in service delivery, with private employers and public bodies,” Dr. Wardlow said. “We have always stressed to them the crucial importance of strong and supportive leadership on equality issues within their own organisations. That same principle also applies in the wider context of ensuring equality of opportunity and the prevention of unlawful discrimination within Northern Ireland.”

Further information is available online: www.equalityni.org/PublicOpinionSurvey

NOTES

The survey asked a range of questions looking at different aspects of equality.

- To the question “which groups of people do you think are protected from unlawful discrimination”, the six most common answers identified the six grounds protected by equality laws, with “racial/ethnic” the most frequently mentioned, by 28% of respondents.
- Similarly, when asked in what settings people are protected by equality law, by far the most common response was “at work”, followed by “accessing public services” and “in education”.
- Most people (73%) agreed that “equality and antidiscrimination laws should be strengthened” and that they “are necessary in Northern Ireland” (90%).
- A majority felt that “workers are generally treated with dignity and respect” (62%) and that “in general workplaces in N I are welcoming and inclusive” (62%).
- A larger majority, however, agreed that “more needs to be done to promote good relations between people of different backgrounds” (88%) and that “more needs to be done to promote equality of opportunity” (80%).
- On education, most people (56%) thought that Travellers and Roma children tend to get fewer qualifications than other children.
- A majority (53%) thought that workplaces tend to support employees with disabilities. On accessibility, 76% agreed with a statement that “the streets and public spaces are accessible for me” and 89% with a similar statement about shops. The profile of the people surveyed shows that 16% identified as having a long-standing illness or a disability.