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PRESS RELEASE

Plasterer settles case for £12.5k against NIHE

Hugo Elliott, has settled a sectarian harassment case against his employer, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) for £12,500. The case was supported by the Equality Commission and it was settled by NIHE without admission of liability.

Mr Elliott, a Catholic man, has worked for his employer since 2013, alleged that he suffered sectarian harassment while working in Coleraine as a plasterer in the Direct Labour Organisation with the NIHE.

In his application to the Tribunal, Mr Elliott provided details of the alleged harassment. He described how Catholics were referred to as Fenians and by other derogatory terms. In July 2018, he was sent messages on his phone wishing him a 'Happy King Billy's Day' and, whilst he was at work, his work van was draped with a Union flag. Mr Elliott was told to personally remove it.

Hugo Elliott said: "I regret that it had to come to this. I have experienced sectarian insults, foul language and some very intimidating behaviour. It was an awful time, it was hurtful and it was wrong, and it badly affected my health. I had to challenge it."

"I asked for help, I reported my concerns but they weren't dealt with. The whole experience wore me down. I know other colleagues were shocked by what they witnessed. I raised a grievance about my treatment in April 2019 and I did not receive the outcome of this until December 2019. I was off work during this time as a direct result of the harassment."

"I just wanted to go to work and do my job. My religion has no bearing on my ability to be a plasterer and in the end the stress of it all made me ill", concluded Mr Elliott.

Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission said:
"Sectarian harassment is not acceptable. There is no place for harassment of any type in our workplaces; everyone is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect at all times.

"Employers have a responsibility to provide and promote a good and harmonious working environment. They should have procedures and policies in place to allow them to deal promptly and seriously with complaints of discrimination or harassment.

“Employees should know how to raise any concerns about harassment and know that their concerns will be taken seriously and it is equally as important that managers are trained accordingly to deal with these concerns.

“We can assist employers with advice and template policies to help them ensure they are creating a safe and welcoming space which is free from discrimination and harassment for all their employees”, concluded Ms McGahey Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.