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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Equality Commission published two investigation reports**

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has found, following investigations, that two public authorities failed to comply with their equality scheme commitments when reviewing and developing particular policies.

The investigations followed complaints to the Commission from two members of the public. They were carried out under Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which places duties on public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations when carrying out their functions.

Commenting on the reports, Chief Commissioner Dr Michael Wardlow said: "These are important duties for all public authorities and fulfilling the commitments of their equality schemes should ensure that consideration of equality and good relations is central to policy development and decision-making.

"An early assessment of the impact of any policy or service on different groups of people ultimately means better outcomes for everyone using public services."

One investigation followed a complaint that Mid and East Antrim Borough Council had failed to comply with its equality scheme commitments when it revised its pricing policy to align fees in leisure centres across the Borough following the reorganisation of local government. The complainant believed that the new concessionary rates negatively affected older people.

The Commission investigation found a failure to comply with its equality scheme, as the Council did not assess the potential equality impacts of the new policy. It should have followed the equality scheme commitments from early in the development of the policy to ensure it considered the impact of the planned changes on various groups of people.

The other investigation followed a complaint that the Department for Infrastructure had failed to comply with its equality scheme commitments when it planned to use an Experimental Traffic Control Scheme to temporarily allow class A taxis to use particular bus lanes over a planned period in 2018. The complainant said that the Experimental Traffic Control Scheme should have been considered as a new policy by the DfI, so it should have been subject to the requirements of the DfI's Equality Scheme, which would have meant a consideration of the potential equality impacts.

The Commission investigation found that the DfI had failed to comply with its equality scheme commitments, as it should have considered the Scheme as a policy and therefore subject to the Department's equality scheme processes.

Dr Wardlow concluded: "It is vital that all public authorities comply with their statutory equality and good relations duties. Public authorities who fail to do so take the risk that their strategies and policies do not adequately consider the needs of the people they serve and that complaints will be made. Early, ongoing and meaningful assessment of needs, as well as communication with communities, can help accountability and decision-making."

Download the investigation findings including the Equality Commission recommendations:

- [Para 10 Investigation – Complainant & the Department for Infrastructure](#) *(pdf)*
- [Para 10 Investigation – Complainant & Mid and East Antrim Borough Council](#) *(pdf)*

#### **Further information**

- [Equality Commission investigations](#)
- [Section 75 duties for NI public authorities](#)