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PRESS RELEASE

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council sign Mental Health Charter

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is delighted to welcome Mid and East Antrim Borough Council as the first signatory of 2021 to the Mental Health Charter.

Dr Evelyn Collins CBE, Chief Executive of the Equality Commission, said: "It is timely that Mid and East Antrim Borough Council have made a voluntary commitment to work to improve the working lives of their employees who are experiencing mental ill-health by signing the Mental Health Charter, especially considering the impact of Covid-19 on all our lives.

"As a result of the pandemic, many employees across Northern Ireland including those in councils are now working from home, some are coping with full-time jobs while home schooling their children. Many are experiencing worries and pressures that did not exist before, putting new or additional stress on everyone's mental health and well-being.

"Signing up to the charter in these unprecedented times will help employers like Mid and East Antrim Borough Council go beyond the law - to make a difference to their employees who need support with their mental health and well-being. We would encourage other employers to follow the council's lead to sign up to the Mental Health Charter and begin an organisational culture change where talking about mental health and well-being is normalised."

Anne Donaghy OBE, Chief Executive of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and Chair of the Local Government Mental Health and Wellbeing Group, said: "I am proud to sign the Mental Health Charter on behalf of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council.

"Mental health is very dear to my own heart and promoting positive mental health and easy access to effective interventions and support mechanisms for all our staff is something I am committed to embedding throughout our organisation and the culture of our Council.

"The Covid-19 pandemic continues to put intense pressure on many within our society and it is vital we all do everything we can to safeguard our mental health in the face of financial worries, the demands of home schooling and working from home, isolation, loneliness and a lack of social interaction. If we don't act decisively now, I fear we face a mental health tsunami within our community as a direct result of Covid-19.

“Just last week, our Council hosted its Mental Health Awareness Week, during which many of our team took part in a wide range of activities and workshops aimed at helping them to protect their mental health and that of their colleagues.

“Prior to that, we launched the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan for Local Government in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Mental Health Strategy is currently out for consultation having been launched by our Health Minister Robin Swann and Minister Swann announced significant investment in perinatal services here.

“These are extremely welcome initiatives and commitments, and it is critical organisations across Northern Ireland continue to work together to urgently tackle mental ill-health and make sure we have every resource we need to fully support our staff and the entire community.”

Notes to Editors

- Further information about this initiative is available online: www.equalityni.org/MentalHealthCharter
- The Charter is a joint project between the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Action Mental Health, Aware, Change Your Mind, Mental Health Foundation, Inspire, BITC, MindWise, Disability Action, Labour Relations Agency and HSE (NI)
- The Mental Health Charter is not an accreditation, an award or a set of quality standards. It shows an organisation’s willingness to work with all the partners in this initiative to ensure that Northern Ireland’s workplaces are more supportive of people who find themselves having to deal with mental illness.