

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Key Point Briefing: Programme for Government (PfG) and Budget Recommendations

May 2016

- 1.1 The Equality Commission has set out below its recommendations in relation to the next PfG and Budget. Equality of opportunity and good relations must be central to all public policy development and implementation, no less so at a time of reduced public spending. Many key inequalities experienced by Section 75 equality groups¹ remain persistent and hard to tackle. We consider that the PfG and Budget provide a key mechanism to maximise equality of opportunity and good relations outcomes.

Recommendations

- 1.2 We **recommend** that:

- there is a **clear commitment** in the PfG, underpinned by the inclusion of robust, outcome focused action measures, to addressing key inequalities experienced by the Section 75 equality groups, as well as to promoting good relations²;
- the PfG makes it explicit that promoting equality of opportunity and good relations are **cross-cutting themes** across all Government strategies, policy development and actions.

- 1.3 We **recommend** that the PfG includes actions to:

Social Attitudes

- challenge prejudicial attitudes, behaviour and hate crime, so as to ensure that workplaces, services, public spaces and communities are free from harassment and/or discrimination across the equality grounds;

¹ Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a duty on public bodies to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependants and persons without.

² Section 75 also places a duty on public bodies to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Education

- ensure a move to a system of education which routinely teaches pupils together via a shared curriculum in shared classes, and where sharing impacts meaningfully and substantively on every learner;
- mainstream equality in education, including in the curriculum, teacher training and the policies/practices of schools and wider education bodies; and tackle prejudice based bullying;
- address education inequalities, including those experienced by Irish Travellers; Protestant working class boys; disabled children/young people;
- address gender stereotyping in education; and remove the barriers facing looked after children and young carers;

Employment

- support women's economic participation, including through access to appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare;
- address the exploitation of migrant workers and the concentration of some minority ethnic workers in low paid employment;
- support disabled people to access and remain in the workplace;
- ensure training and programmes to enable people to access and progress in work that is accessible and inclusive for all;

Access to Social Protection

- protect the most vulnerable from the adverse impact of welfare reform, particularly mindful of the impact on people with disabilities and women, minority ethnic communities (including asylum seekers and refugees);
- identify/ commit to specific measures which will mitigate the adverse impact of welfare reform, or any alternate policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity;

Housing, Accomodation & Communities

- develop safe, shared communities based on equality, dignity and respect;

- ensure that everyone has access to a safe, secure home and enjoys the right to independent living, including for people with disabilities and older people;
- address the housing needs of particular equality groups, such as Irish Travellers, and minority ethnic communities (including migrant workers and refugees);

Health, Social Care and Well Being

- identify and remove barriers to health, social care and well being experienced by particular Section 75 equality groups, including older people; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB) people; Irish Travellers and other minority ethnic communities; and people with disabilities;
- ensure investment in health care so as to address the specific needs of equality groups, including the health care needs of people with disabilities; and young people's mental health needs;

Participation in Public Life and Decision making

- increase the participation of women in political/public life and decision making, including peacebuilding;
- promote the participation of other under-represented Section 75 groups in public life, including people with disabilities, LGB people, older people, and minority ethnic communities;

Reform of Equality law

- reform and strengthen equality law across a number of equality grounds, including age (as regards the provision of goods, facilities and services), race, disability, sex, fair employment, and sexual orientation;
- reform wider areas of the law that impact on Section 75 equality groups³;

Address Gaps in Equality Data

- address key gaps in equality data, including on the grounds of gender identity, sexual orientation, and race;

³ For example, changes to law so as to permit same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland.

- rectify the lack of data disaggregation in relation to ethnicity, disability and gender;

Develop & Implement Equality Strategies

- ensure that effective equality/ good relations strategies and action plans are implemented and updated across the full range of anti-discrimination grounds;
- set out a timetabled commitment to take this key work forward- including as regards a Gender Equality Strategy; a Racial Equality Strategy; a Disability Strategy; a Sexual Orientation Strategy; a Children and Young Person's Strategy; an Active Ageing Strategy, as well as a Strategy to promote good relations (*Together: Building a United Community*: TBUC);

Compliance with International Conventions

- address key shortfalls in Northern Ireland so as to ensure compliance with obligations in international human rights conventions, including the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD)⁴.

Budget proposals: Actions to meet equality/ good relations requirements

- 1.4 In the preparation of budget proposals, Departments and other public authorities should ensure that they are fulfilling their statutory equality and good relations duties.
- 1.5 The Commission has set out in guidance how Section 75 duties and equality scheme commitments apply to the budget processes⁵. Equality scheme arrangements and tools - i.e. screening and equality impact assessment (EQIA) - provide a means for Departments and other public authorities to assess the likely impacts of the budget proposals.

Further Information:

See our PfG recommendations in full [ECNI Recommendations: Programme for Government and Budget](#), May 2016 (26 pages).

See [Section 75 and Budgets: a short guide for public authorities](#), ECNI, 2015.

⁴As well as obligations in other international Conventions, such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD), the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM).

⁵ [Section 75 and Budgets: a short guide for public authorities](#), ECNI, 2015