

Promoting Sexual Orientation Equality

Priorities and Recommendations

Summary Version

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

October 2013

1 Summary of Commission Priorities and Recommendations

- 1.1 The purpose of this summary paper is to inform policy developments to promote sexual orientation equality in Northern Ireland by setting out the Commission's high level policy recommendations.
- 1.2 This paper sets out, in summary, the Commission's views on the effective and targeted legal and policy responses that are required to promote equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people in Northern Ireland.
- 1.3 A copy of the Commission's full policy position can be downloaded from www.equalityni.org/sexualorientation

Strategic issues

- 1.4 In summary, we have set out below the range of strategic issues, including priority areas for strategic action, which we recommend that the Executive, Departments and other key stakeholders address, including via the proposed Sexual Orientation Strategy.
- 1.5 We recommend that **priority areas** for strategic action are:
- **tackling prejudicial attitudes and behaviour** towards LGB individuals; specifically in relation to homophobic hate crime and violence; harassment both inside and outside the workplace and homophobic bullying in schools; and
 - **promoting positive attitudes** towards LGB individuals; and
 - **raising awareness of the rights** of LGB people; both amongst LGB people themselves and amongst those with responsibilities under the sexual orientation equality legislation.
- 1.6 We recommend strategic action in the following areas, which include the above mentioned priority areas.

Tackling prejudicial attitudes and behaviours

- tackle prejudicial attitudes and behaviour on the grounds of sexual orientation - with a particular focus on action to tackle homophobic hate crime and violence; homophobic

harassment both inside and outside the workplace; and homophobic bullying in schools and homophobia in sport;

- promote positive attitudes towards LGB individuals; for example, by action taken by political leaders, the media, public bodies, private and voluntary sector employers and schools and education bodies.

Promoting LGB equality inside and outside the workplace

- raise awareness of the rights of LGB people, including through the promotion of their rights relating to equality, and remove barriers to their accessing equality rights;
- promote sexual orientation equality in employment and vocational training; and
- embed equality of opportunity for pupils of different sexual orientation within education;
- remove barriers experienced by LGB individuals when accessing goods and services, including in areas such as accessing health care and blood donation; and
- tackle barriers associated with LGB people with multiple identities, for example, older LGB individuals, or disabled LGB people.

Strengthening legal protections

- reform sexual orientation equality law so as to ensure robust legislative protection for LGB individuals against discrimination and harassment, as well as to strengthen enforcement of the legislation;
- introduce legislation that permits same -sex marriage and provides heterosexual couples access to civil partnerships on the same basis as that available to same sex couples;
- extend the scope of adoption legislation so as to allow unmarried couples, those in civil partnership and same sex couples to apply to be considered as adoptive parents.

Delivering LGB equality

- 1.7 We recommend that the Executive, Departments and other key stakeholders address the above issues, including via the proposed Sexual Orientation Strategy.

1.8 In order to ensure the ensure both the successful implementation of these strategic actions, and that those actions result in meaningful and tangible outcomes for the LGB community in Northern Ireland, we further recommend:

- visible political, civic and community **leadership** in order to achieve the vision and promote and sustain change;
- a focus on the robust **monitoring and evaluation** of actions together with a focus on improving **outcomes** for LGB individuals;
- a **co-ordinated approach** across the public, private and voluntary community sector in order to address barriers and to promote and share good practice;
- a commitment to **partnership working** with the LGB sector and the need to empower and build the capacity of LGB individuals and representative groups.

The Sexual Orientation Strategy

1.9 The specific current context for our recommendations is the Executive's proposal to develop and consult on a sexual orientation Strategy. The Executive made it clear in its Programme for Government that one of the building blocks required to address the challenges of disadvantage and inequality that afflict Northern Ireland society is the development of the sexual orientation action plan.¹

1.10 We welcome the recent commitment in the Executive's Strategy, *Together - Building a United Community*² to produce a sexual orientation Strategy by the end of 2013, following a public consultation exercise.

1.11 We consider that the publication of a robust, outcome focused, and comprehensive sexual orientation Strategy will send a strong statement of the Executive's commitment to promoting equality for LGB people in Northern Ireland.

¹ <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg-2011-2015-final-report.pdf>

² *Together - Building a United Community*, 2013
http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf