Chapter 4

Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-28

Northern Ireland Social Care Council

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We will consider any request for this document in another format or language.

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1. Introduction

As Chair and Chief Executive of the Social Care Council – we are committed to promoting equality and good relations. For people with a disability, we recognise that we have to do more to promote positive attitudes and to encourage their participation in public life.

We want to make sure we do this in a way that makes a difference to people. We will put in place what is necessary to do so. This includes people, time and money. Where it is right to do so, we will include actions from this plan in the yearly plans we develop for the organisation as a whole. These are called 'corporate' or 'business' plans.

We will also put everything in place in the organisation to make sure that we do what we have to under the law. This includes making one person responsible overall for making sure we do what we say we are going to do in our Equality and Disability Action Plans.

We will make sure we let our staff know what is in our plans. We will also train our staff and help them understand what they need to do.

The person in our organisation who is responsible for making sure that we do what we have promised to do is Sandra Stranaghan. When you have any questions you can contact her at:

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2. Who we are and what we do

The Social Care Council is part of health and social care in Northern Ireland. We do things like:

- Maintain the register which has around 50,000 social workers, social care practitioners and students on it.

- We carry out investigations about the conduct of social workers and social care workers who are registered with us. Social workers and social care workers have Standards of Conduct and Practice which they must comply with.

- Review the Standards to ensure they are always up to date and reflect good practice.

- Ensure those who are registered complete all the necessary training they need.

- Take into account the views and experiences of service users and carers when we are planning and delivering our work.

3. How people can be involved in our work

Some of the main ways in which people can be involved in the work of the Social Care Council are:

- Meetings of Social Care Council's Board are open to the public and can provide a way to observe how the Social Care Council works. Minutes of meetings are also published on our website and can be provided in hard copy if necessary.

- Users of social care services and carers are encouraged to be members of our Participation Partnership which challenges how the Social Care Council designs and delivers its business and policies.

- We publicly consult on a wide range of policies and initiatives and encourage the public to respond and help us ensure our business best meets the needs of those who use social care services.

- We advertise for lay members (members of the public with experience of social care) to apply to be panel members for Fitness to Practise hearings.

4. What the law says

The Social Care Council has to follow the law under **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**. It says that in our work we have to promote equality and good relations. We have to treat people fairly and based on their needs and to make things better for staff and people who use our services. It also says that we have to build better relationships between different groups of people.

There are nine different equality groups that the law requires us to look at:

- Gender (and gender identities)
- Age
- Religion
- Political opinion
- Ethnicity
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Marital status
- Having dependants or not.

There are three good relations groups we need to consider:

- Religion
- Political opinion
- Ethnicity.

We also have to follow the law under the **Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006**, which says that we have to:

- promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

This includes people with any type of disability, whether for example, physical disabilities; sensory disabilities (such as sight loss or hearing loss); autism; learning disabilities; dyslexia; mental health conditions (such as depression); or conditions that are long-term (such as cancer or diabetes). Some of these disabilities may be hidden, others may be visible.

Both pieces of legislation require us to develop an action plan: an Equality Action Plan and a Disability Action Plan. We have to send these plans to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and then report every year on what we have done.

5. How we reviewed our last plans and developed these new plans

In starting off to develop this plan we looked at what we have done so far to promote equality and good relations, to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and to encourage their participation in public life.

As part of our Five Year Review, we asked all teams in our organisation to think through the following questions:

- What has worked well?
- What hasn't worked well?
- What lessons have we learned?
- Did we do what we said we would do?
- Has this made a difference for people in the way we thought it would?

For the new plans, we asked them to consider two questions:

- In your area of work, what are the key issues for people in the equality groupings?
- What can you do to address these issues?

We encouraged our staff to look at a range of sources of information such as:

- our Five Year Review of Equality Scheme
- monitoring data
- new research or data
- equality screening exercises that have been completed
- their professional experience and knowledge
- issues raised in consultations or through other engagement with staff and people who use services and carers.

We engaged closely with Tapestry, our Disability Staff Network, in the development of our Disability Action Plans. We held a focus group with them to find out what issues are important to them as a

member of staff with a disability or as a carer which they think the organisation should address as a priority.

We also read what the Equality Commission says would be good to do. All this helped us think about what else we could do to make a difference.

6. What we have done so far

This is some of what we have done to promote equality under our previous Equality Action Plan:

- We produced a leaflet targeted at staff who are carers. It highlights the policies and support offered by the Business Services Organisation (BSO) and HSC Regional Organisations, and also signposts Carers to different local sources of help. Details are also provided on counselling and advice services. The leaflet is included on the Tapestry website, and was forwarded to staff through a series of corporate communications.

This is some of what we have done to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people

- We held 17 disability awareness days for our staff. Each looked at a different disability. The aim is to increase the knowledge and awareness of our staff including how to support a person with that particular disability. Since the pandemic we have been holding these online via Zoom. The sessions are recorded and uploaded to the website of Tapestry, our disability staff network.

- We developed a dedicated module on disability as part of our e-learning resource called ‘Making a Difference’. It is available to all Health and Social Care staff. All our staff have been asked to complete the programme at induction.

- We delivered training sessions on mental health awareness to our staff, including on mental health first aid, mindfulness and managing stress, and courses for staff who are carers.

Encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

- We developed a protocol to better enable people who use services and their carers to attend meetings at and with the Social Care Council. We engaged our Participation Partnership members to help us in the development of this.

- Together with our partners, we set up Tapestry, a disability network for our staff. Part of the role of this network is to raise disability issues with decision makers in our organisation.

- We participated in a disability work placement scheme, facilitated by the BSO for all the 11 regional Health and Social Care organisations. So far, we have hosted two placements in the Social Care Council. We train participants on how to apply for a job in Health and Social Care organisations, including mock interviews.

7. What we have learned so far

Some of the key points we have learned from developing and implementing our action plans are described below.

Disability Placement Scheme

- We learned that it is important to bring people together not just at induction stage but also at the end of the placement. We therefore now run an End of Year event too, to celebrate the achievement with everyone involved (participants, placement managers, Employment Support Officers, and the facilitators).

- It is vital that participants are reimbursed for their travel cost quickly. Therefore, we have agreed the principle that no participant will be out of pocket for their expenses for more than 1 week.

- The work environment plays an important role for many participants so we have built in this aspect into the written information that placement managers provide upfront on the placement offered.

- A high turn over amongst Employment Support Officers poses particular challenges for ensuring consistency in the implementation of the scheme. An internal briefing for new officers before the scheme kicks off should address this issue.

Disability Awareness Days

- Since we moved our awareness days online we have seen a huge rise in numbers of staff attending our events. Also, they come from a wider range of locations.

- Recording the sessions has been a great success. This means staff who can't attend on the day can access the event whenever it suits them.

- There is a huge information need for staff who are carers of a person with a disability, for example of a person living with ADHD or with dementia.

- Staff are interested in learning more about how to support a family member, not just colleagues in the workplace.

We have found that attendance at awareness day events is greatest when the subject is most relevant to staff. This can be because they have the condition themselves or they know or work with someone who has the condition. We will continue to ask staff which areas relating to disability they would like more information on.

Tapestry – Disability Staff Network

- The network needs refreshed and promoted on an ongoing basis.

- For a network to be effective in its supporting and influencing role, a committed HR presence at senior level is essential as is the timely engagement and consultation on policies/decisions/strategies etc. to inform the development of these.

8. What is in the new plans

There are two separate tables below. The first table lists all the actions that we will do to promote equality and good relations. This is our Equality Action Plan.

The second table describes what we will do to promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability and to encourage their participation in public life. This is our Disability Action Plan.

In both plans we also say what difference we hope to make and when we will do these actions.

9. How we will monitor these plans

Every year we will write up what we have done. We will also explain when we haven't done something. We send this report to the Equality Commission. We also publish this report on our website: https://niscc.info/equality-and-diversity/

We will have a look at the plans every year to see whether we need to make any changes to them. If we need to, we will write those changes into the plans. Before we make any big changes we talk to people in the equality groupings to see what they think.

When we finish an action we will take it off the plans for the next year. That way we will keep our plans up to date. They will show what we still have to do.

After five years we will look at our plans again to see how we have done. We will also see what else we could do.

Whenever we develop or look at our plans we will invite people who have a disability to help us.

The plans are also available on our website:
https://niscc.info/equality-and-diversity/

We will send our plans to all organisations and individuals on our consultation list when we have finalised them and also when we have made major changes to them.

To find out whether what we do makes a difference, we will do a number of things, for example:

- For training and awareness events, we ask our staff about what learning they are taking away with them.

- We check summary figures to see whether, for example, more people from a particular under-represented group are availing of a service after promoting it to them specifically.

You can find further information on how we will monitor each action in the plans themselves.

10. Equality Action Plan 2023-28: What we will do to promote equality and good relations

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve and who for (ie. which Section 75 category specifically)	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
Policy We will use the Section 75 data to monitor Referrals for Fitness to Practise; and uptake/completion of Social Work and Social Care training to identify any gaps or trends in relation to the registered workforce.	We want to ascertain if there are any differences in the experiences and outcomes for each of the Section 75 groups.	We will review the data we hold in relation to each of these areas and develop an action plan to address these findings.	Social Care Council By March 2028
Monitoring We will encourage all staff to keep their Section 75 data up to date including whether they have a disability and/or have caring responsibilities once every year.	We want to ensure that the data we use for equality screening is up to date and accurate so that we can ensure we are identifying any potential issues and mitigating against these when making decisions or policies.	We will work with staff to ensure at least 70% of staff have added their Section 75 data to HRPTS.	Social Care Council with BSO Human Resources By March 2025

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve and who for (ie. which Section 75 category specifically)	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
We will work with Registrants to improve the Section 75 data we hold through a communications plan.	We want to ensure that the data we use for equality screening is up to date and accurate so that we can ensure we are identifying any potential issues and mitigating against these when making decisions or policies.	Our ICT system supports the collection and management of Registrants Section 75 and the gaps in data are reduced by 25% on 2023 baselines.	Social Care Council By March 2028
We will review our section 75 data for staff and how this supports our workforce to ensure that we address any gaps identified.	We want to ensure that we have a diverse workforce reflective of the community.	We will seek to address any gaps identified.	Social Care Council by March 2025
Embracing Equality, Diversity and Good Relations We will ensure all staff are trained on equality, diversity and good relations.	We want all staff to be fully aware of their role and the role of others and the	All staff will be trained on equality, diversity and good relations as	Social Care Council By March 2028

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve and who for (ie. which Section 75 category specifically)	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
We will ensure staff who have a role in developing policy or decisions are trained appropriately to do so.	organisation to support our Equality Scheme.	arranged throughout the year.	
We will ensure our decision makers at Senior Leadership and Board level are training on equality, diversity and good relations.	We want our Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Board to lead our agenda in relation to equality and its role in supporting the workforce and our business.	The Board and SLT provide an oversight, leadership and challenge role in relation to equality.	Social Care Council By March 2026.
We will work with staff to ensure equality, diversity and good relations is part of our culture and can be readily evidenced as a positive experience for all.	We want to ensure that our culture is a positive experience for all and that staff demonstrate the values and behaviours that underpin an inclusive working environment.	We will organise a staff workshop to examine how equality, diversity and good relations operate within the organisation and will develop an action plan to address any gaps.	Social Care Council By December 2024

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve and who for (ie. which Section 75 category specifically)	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
Gender Equality We will undertake a review including engagement with representative groups and individuals to take account of gender identities and develop an action plan as a result. **Domestic Violence** We will undertake awareness raising relating to new support mechanisms (developed by BSO) to support staff with experience of domestic violence.	We want to ensure that service users who identify as transgender, non-binary and intersex feel more supported. Staff with experience of domestic violence feel better supported.	Evidence of consideration and actions to address any issues reported on in annual review of progress. Feedback from staff who have drawn support through the mechanisms indicates a positive experience.	Social Care Council By March 2028 Social Care Council and BSO Human Resources By March 2025
Race Equality			

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve and who for (ie. which Section 75 category specifically)	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
We will ensure all staff are trained in relation to race equality.	All staff have a good awareness of race equality and the behaviours expected of them.	All staff are trained and can demonstrate awareness through feedback and surveys.	Social Care Council with support from the Equality Unit in BSO. By June 2024.

11. Disability Action Plan 2023-28: What we will do to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
Awareness Days Raise awareness of the lived experience of people with specific disabilities and conditions.	**Promoting positive attitudes:** Increased staff awareness of a range of disabilities and conditions.	2 awareness days profiled every year. >50% of staff taking part in the evaluation indicate they know more about people living with disabilities and conditions as a result of the awareness days.	Senior Management with support from BSO Equality Unit. End March 2028
Placement Scheme Create and promote meaningful placement opportunities for people with disabilities.	**Promoting positive attitudes and Encouraging participation in public life:** People with a disability gain meaningful work experience. People with a disability are successful in applying for paid	At least 1 placement offered every year. Feedback through annual evaluation of scheme indicates that placement meets expectations.	Senior Management with support from BSO Equality Unit. End March 2028

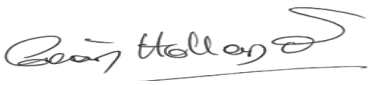
What we will do	What we are trying to achieve	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
	employment after they have completed a placement.	At least 1 placement participant is successful in applying for paid employment within 12 months of completing their placement.	
Tapestry Consolidate Tapestry into the Social Care Council's Health and Wellbeing Committee to encourage uptake and awareness as part of the organisation's wellbeing programme.	**Encouraging participation in public life:** Staff with a disability feel better supported.	Tapestry staff survey	Senior Management with support from BSO Equality Unit End March 2028
Working together with Tapestry we will coproduce, commission and deliver, and evaluate a disability training plan and will encourage our staff to participate	Staff with a disability feel better supported.	Tapestry staff survey	With support from Tapestry By March 2026
Engagement and Communications We will work with service users, carers and people with a disability to ensure they have opportunities to	We want to ensure our engagement with service users, carers and people with	We will develop an engagement programme with service users, carers	Social Care Council - from 2025 demonstrate using the new model

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
inform our work and are supported to attend events, including training.	a disability is meaningful and meets their expectations, experiences and needs.	and people with a disability that we can adopt as a model for future years.	
We will add a section to our intranet detailing how to book a sign language interpreter for both service user and staff/workplace settings.	All staff will know how to book a sign language interpreter – including new staff.	Ability to engage an interpreter when needed.	Social Care Council By March 2027
We will undertake an audit of our website to: 1) identify key information to be made available in signed video format and 2) ensure relevant contact details are available and up to date.	Key information and any important documents are available so that people who are D/deaf are receiving the same information as others. Structural information, description of what the team functions are and contact details will assist those outside the organisation to identify and reach the correct person.	Plans to develop and extend access to information in place.	Social Care Council To deliver a plan to improve access to information By March 2028

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
We will work with our stakeholders to see how we can influence and address barriers or issues for D/deaf students applying to be a Student Social Worker	We want to promote D/deaf people to consider a career as a social worker.	Barriers/issues identified and plans to address these in place.	Social Care Council By March 2028
Training We will ensure all staff receive timely and relevant training including e-learning and face to face in relation to disability awareness.	We want all staff (including new staff) to be aware of what we expect of them in relation to disability awareness and that a positive attitude and approach to disability is part of our culture.	All staff will be trained on disability awareness as arranged throughout the year.	Social Care Council By end 2028.
Recruitment We will actively work to promote people with a disability including D/deaf people to join our organisation.	That all people are able to actively apply for jobs and be supported in doing so.	Increased percentage of workforce with a disability.	Social Care Council By March 2027.

Signed by:

Chair: Sean Holland



Date: 14th October 2026

Chief Executive: Tracy Reid

Date: 14th October 2026

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