

**Title: Northern Ireland Social Care Council – Equality and Disability
Action Plans October 2023 to March 2028**

Date: 6 December 2023

Presented by: Sandra Stranaghan, Head of Business Services

ACTION REQUIRED

This Paper is	For Approval
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SUMMARY

Our Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan were ended in March 2023. We received approval from the Equality Commission to extend out this period to enable a consultation on new Equality and Disability Action Plans. The Equality Unit in BSO led the consultation which ran for 13 weeks between April and July 2023. The Social Care Council actively participated in the consultation including engaging the Board, staff, Participation Partnership and attended the consultee engagement events including one with the British Deaf Association (BDA).

As a result of the consultation we have updated our **draft Equality and Disability Action Plans [Appendix I]**.

Due to the timing of the consultation paper and outcomes, a draft has been submitted to the Equality Commission indicating that a final version will follow following the Board's consideration and approval.

To assist staff and others accessing our Plans we have developed a short one-page overview with key activities over the next five years (we will do many other things over these years to support equality and diversity in addition to what we are committing to in our action plans) – the **overview is at Appendix II**.

BACKGROUND

Our Equality Action Plans relate to our duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which states 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.

The Disability Action Plans relate to our disability duties. They arise from the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. It says that we have to:

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

We have indicated what we plan to do to support equality and diversity over the next five years and have taken into account what we heard during the consultation. A detailed **report on the consultation exercise** is attached [**Appendix III**].

KEY ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

The Equality and Disability Action Plans [Appendix I] set out in detail what we hope to achieve and deliver over the next five years. Some of these actions will be delivered solely by the Social Care Council, some will be delivered in partnership with BSO and some will be delivered by the Equality Unit in BSO:

Equality

- We intend to carry out an exercise to review the Section 75 data for referrals for Fitness to Practise to see what, if any differences, there are – and what issues we may need to consider to address these.
- We will carry out a similar exercise in relation to the uptake/completion of Social Work and Social Care training to identify any gaps or trends in relation to the registered workforce.
- We will continue to encourage staff to keep their Section 75 data up to date and will work with Registrants to improve the Section 75 data we hold.
- We will ensure all staff are trained on equality, diversity and good relations, and ensure staff who have a role in developing policy or decisions are trained appropriately to do so (including our Board members).
- We will ensure our staff are trained on race equality.
- We will also 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.

Diversity

- We will continue to raise awareness of the lived experience of people with specific disabilities and conditions.
- We will continue to create and promote meaningful placement opportunities for people with disabilities.
- We will continue to promote and encourage staff to participate in the disability staff network and support the network in the delivery of its priorities (Tapestry)
- We will consolidate Tapestry into our Health and Wellbeing Committee to encourage uptake and awareness as part of the organisation's wellbeing programme.
- We will work with Tapestry to co-produce, commission and deliver, and evaluate a disability training plan and will encourage our staff to participate.

- We will work with service users, carers and people with a disability to ensure they have opportunities to inform our work and are supported to attend events, including training.
- We will add a section to our intranet detailing how to book a sign language interpreter for both service user and staff/workplace settings.
- We will undertake an audit of our website to identify key information to be made available in signed video format and ensure relevant contact details are available and up to date
- 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 will ensure a Board member is appointed as a Disability Champion and that they are supported in this role to promote and lead the organisation on issues affecting people with a disability.
- We will ensure all staff receive timely and relevant training including e-learning and face to face in relation to disability awareness.
- We will actively work to promote people with a disability including D/deaf people to join our organisation.

Next Steps

We will submit a final version of the Plans to the Equality Commission and put a final version of our Plans on our website (including sending a copy on the Equality Unit in BSO).

We will report on our progress through our Annual Equality Progress Reports each year and continue to engage with our stakeholders to ensure we are continuing to deliver what we set out to do.

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

This formed part of a detailed consultation exercise that included online surveys, online and in person meetings, social media and hybrid events. This is detailed at Appendix II.

We carried out an **equality screening exercise** as part of this process [**Appendix IV**].

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Board review the draft Equality Action Plans for final approval [**Appendix I**]

ATTACHED DOCUMENTS AND/OR LINKS HERE

Appendix I – Draft Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-28

Appendix II – Overview of Action Plans

Appendix III - Outcome of the consultation event

Appendix IV – Equality Screening