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our Equality Scheme Appendix Foreword The Electoral Commission is a public body that  
serves the electorate across the whole of the United Kingdom. Our aim is to provide  
equal access to democracy for all. That is why, in line with previous Equality  
Schemes, we have produced an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy which covers  
all parts of the UK. Like any organisation, we have a range of statutory obligations  
to ensure we promote equality, diversity and inclusivity. We have set out in the  
strategy what these are and how we comply with them in our activities. But equality,  
diversity and inclusion go beyond compliance. We know we have to do more to meet this  
challenge. Our Strategy sets out our aspirations to go further and challenge  
ourselves to reflect fully the diversity of the electorate in our work to support  
democracy. We recognise however that different legislation on equalities applies in  
Northern Ireland. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) requires public  
authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have  
due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the  
desirability of promoting good relations between people of different religious  
belief, political opinion or racial group. In this Equality Scheme we set out how the  
Electoral Commission proposes to fulfil these statutory duties and the other  
statutory duties which apply. We will commit the necessary resources in terms of  
people, time and money to make sure that we comply with the Section 75 statutory  
duties and that the equality scheme is implemented effectively and on time. We commit  
to having effective internal arrangements in place for ensuring our effective  
compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties and for monitoring and reviewing our  
progress. We will continue to deliver a programme of communication and training for  
staff and Board members. We will continue to raise awareness for our consultees on  
the Section 75 statutory duties and our commitments in our equality scheme. We  
realise the importance of the role of the community and voluntary sector and the  
general public in ensuring that these duties are effectively implemented; our Scheme  
is designed to ensure that there are opportunities for those affected by our work to  
influence how we carry out these duties and to offer the opportunity to make  
complaints where we do not. We will report annually to the Equality Commission for  
Northern Ireland (ECNI) on our delivery of this scheme and our equalities progress in  
Northern Ireland including our progress against our Disability Action Plan. On behalf  
of the Electoral Commission we are pleased to support and endorse this Equality  
Scheme which has been drawn up in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the  
Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the guidelines of the Northern Ireland Equality  
Commission and which forms part of our wider Equality, Diversity and Inclusion  
Strategy. We are fully committed to effectively fulfilling our Section 75 statutory  
duties across all our functions (including service provision, procurement and  
employment) through the effective implementation of this Scheme. Chapter 1:  
Introduction Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 Section 75 of the Northern

Ireland Act 1998 requires the Electoral Commission to comply with two statutory duties: Section 75 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) requires us, in carrying out our functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity: between people of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation between men and women generally between people with a disability and people without, and between people with dependants and people without Section 75 (2) requires us in addition to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. "Functions" includes our "powers and duties" including our employment and procurement functions. How we propose to fulfil the Section 75 duties in relation to our relevant functions Schedule 9.4 (1) of the 1998 Act requires us as a designated public authority to set out in an Equality Scheme how it proposes to fulfil the duties imposed by Section 75. This Scheme accordingly sets out how we propose to do so and our plan for implementation. We are committed to the discharge of our Section 75 obligations in all parts of our organisation, and we will commit the necessary available resources in terms of people, time and money to ensure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that our Equality Scheme can be implemented effectively. We have set out in Chapter 1 of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy the purpose and objectives of the Electoral Commission across the UK. Chapter 2: Our arrangements for assessing our compliance with the section 75 duties The Electoral Commission has three key objectives for equality, diversity and inclusion: Objective 1: ensure that everyone who is eligible is able to participate in the democratic process, whether as voter, campaigner or standing for office, by identifying barriers, making recommendations and working with others to remove them. This will be delivered through a range of activities seeking to promote equality in the democratic process. Objective 2: ensure that we embed equality, diversity and inclusion in all our work, treat all our customers and partners fairly and with respect, and are transparent in the decisions we make. This will be delivered by ensuring that equality is embedded in our processes and decisions. Objective 3: ensure equality of opportunity for everyone at the Commission and ensure that all our staff are treated fairly and with respect. This will be delivered through a range of policies designed to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion for all those who work and apply to work at the Commission. We set out in our Strategy the steps we have already taken to promote equality, diversity and inclusion and our priorities for action. The Action Plan sets out what we propose to do next, when we will do it, how we will measure success and who is responsible for delivery. Our arrangements for compliance with our statutory duties under Section 75 are set out at para 2.7 below. Further detail can be found in Chapter 3 (consultation), Chapter 4 (assessing, monitoring and publishing the impact of policies), Chapter 6 (ensuring and assessing public access to information and services), Chapter 8 (complaints) and Chapter 9 (publication). Responsibilities and reporting We are committed to the fulfilment of our Section 75 obligations in all parts of our work. By delegated authority, overall responsibility for the Commission's Single Equality Scheme rests with our Chief Executive. Operational responsibility for the day to day implementation of this scheme in respect of Northern Ireland rests with the Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland. The development, maintenance, implementation and review of our Single Equality Scheme in line with our statutory duties and good practice issued by the ECNI is the responsibility of the Commission's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead. They report to the Head of Strategic Planning and Performance as part of the Directorate

of Finance and Corporate Services. If you have any questions or comments please contact: Cahir Hughes Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland 4 Cromac Place The Gasworks Belfast BT7 2JB 0333 103 1928 [inonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:inonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk)

Objectives and targets relating to our statutory duties and our objectives for equality, diversity and inclusion are integrated into our strategic and operational business plans. These are also reflected in employees' job descriptions, objectives and regular performance reviews. We will prepare an annual review of the progress we have made on implementing the arrangements set out in this scheme and how we meet our Section 75 statutory duties. We will send this annual report of our progress to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland by 31 August each year and will be mindful of any guidance on annual reporting issued by the Equality Commission. We will publish progress reports on our website after each annual review, and will include an update on progress in our Annual Report. Our Annual Report is available on our website [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk) or by contacting: Cahir Hughes Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland 4 Cromac Place The Gasworks Belfast BT7 2JB 0333 103 1928 [inonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:inonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk)

We will liaise closely with the ECNI to ensure that progress on the implementation of this equality scheme is maintained. Our EDI Strategy and this Scheme have been approved by the Electoral Commission Board. Our Action Plan and our Timetable for Action in Northern Ireland We have developed an Action Plan for the Commission which forms part of this Strategy. Appendix 4 of this Scheme sets out a Timetable for Action in Northern Ireland. Our Plan and Timetable have been developed and prioritised on the basis of an audit of inequalities set out in Chapter 1 of the Strategy. This has gathered and analysed information across Section 75 categories to identify the inequalities that exist for our service users and those affected by our policies. It sets out how we propose to deliver against our three equality objectives based on our analysis of the inequalities that may exist for our service users, those affected by our policies and those who work for the Commission. We have set out proposed actions which are specific, measurable, linked to achievable outcomes, realistic and timebound, We have identified performance indicators, timescales and responsibilities. The Action Plan and Timetable are aligned with our corporate planning and annual business planning cycles, and actions are reflected in our Operational Plans. We have consulted stakeholders on the Strategy, Action Plan and Timetable and will keep under review with them. We will monitor progress on the delivery of these action measures annually and update the Action Plan and Timetable as necessary. We will inform the ECNI of any changes or amendments to our Action Plan and Timetable and will also include this information in our Section 75 annual progress report to the Commission. Our Section 75 annual progress report will incorporate information on progress we have made in implementing our action plans/action measures. The Action Plan and Timetable can be obtained from our website [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk) or by contacting: Cahir Hughes Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland 4 Cromac Place The Gasworks Belfast BT7 2JB 0333 103 1928 [inonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:inonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk)

The Scheme is available on request in alternative formats. Chapter 3: Our arrangements for consulting Chapter 3 summary We recognise the importance of consultation in all aspects of our work and specifically in the implementation of our statutory equality duties. We will consult on our Strategy, Scheme and Action Plan, on Equality Impact Assessments and other matters relevant to our equality duties and specifically to the Section 75 statutory duties. We will consult in accordance with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland guidance 'Section 75 of the Northern

Ireland Act 1998 – A guide for public authorities (April 2010)’. This may include consulting the ECNI, representative groups of Section 75 categories, voluntary and community groups, and other groups who have a legitimate interest in the matter as appropriate. All consultations will seek the views of those directly affected by the issue under discussion: the ECNI, representative groups, voluntary and community groups, staff and trade unions and other groups who have a legitimate interest in the process whether or not they have a direct economic or personal interest. This will be carried out initially by notifying all consultees we have identified in the most appropriate way (for example e-mail), followed up as appropriate by targeted consultation. We will consult as early as possible and tailor our methods of consultation to what our stakeholders tell us is appropriate. Methods of consultation could include e-mail contact, discussion with representative groups and discussion with those directly affected. This list is not exhaustive and we may use other methods. We will consider accessibility and format in providing information to ensure barriers in responding to consultation are removed as far as possible, and give consideration to how best to communicate with young people, people with disabilities such as learning disabilities, and black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. We will make information available in alternative formats on request and make sure we do so in a timely fashion allowing equal time for consultees to respond. We will where appropriate provide specific training on facilitating consultations. We will develop a programme of awareness raising through social media, campaigns and partnerships which complements the work we currently do with stakeholders. In order to ensure groups have enough time to consult amongst themselves, we will consult for a minimum of twelve weeks unless there are exceptional circumstances, for example any created by public health emergencies or unscheduled electoral events, where this is not feasible: in such circumstances we may consult for eight weeks or after implementation. We will review and monitor to ensure that any impacts of the policy are considered. We will as a matter of course allow a longer period for consultation on complex matters or where holiday periods supervene. We will take appropriate measures to meet the differing needs of those attending consultation meetings. We will make information available in appropriate formats and including detailed information on the policy proposal and relevant quantitative and qualitative data. In making a decision with respect to a policy which is adopted or proposed for adoption, we will take into account any assessment and consultation. We will provide feedback which is timely; which covers the policy, a summary of comments and a summary of our consideration and response; and which is in a format suitable to consultees. We have included a list of our consultees at the end of this appendix and it is available on our website. It can also be obtained from our website [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk), or by contacting Cahir Hughes Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland 4 Cromac Place The Gasworks Belfast BT7 2JB 0333 103 1928 [inonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:inonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk) Our consultation list is not exhaustive and will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it remains relevant to our functions and policies. We welcome enquiries from people and/or organisations who would like to be added to this list, and invite them to contact the Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland.

Chapter 4: Our arrangements for assessing, monitoring and publishing the impact of policies Our arrangements for assessing the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed for adoption on the promotion of equality of opportunity In terms of our equality duties ‘policy’ is broadly defined and covers all the ways in which we carry out or propose to carry out our functions as a regulator; this includes any strategy, plan, function, project, service, event

or review. The term policy is also used for any proposed, amended or existing strategy, policy initiative or practice and/or decision, whether written or unwritten and irrespective of the label given to it, e.g. 'draft', 'pilot'. When we make policy decisions, we will take into account any assessment and consultation that has been carried out in relation to the policy. We use evidence based screening and equality impact assessments to analyse the likely impact of a policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. In carrying out these assessments we will relate them to the intended outcomes of the policy in question and will continue to engage with the ECNI to ensure best practice. We will trial and consult on a new Equality Impact Assessment approach. This comprises a new form for screening, an updated EQIA template and full guidance to help officers complete an EQIA. We have also clarified our scrutiny and sign-off process. The recruitment of a permanent EDI lead will provide resource and support for those completing EQIAs. We have also rolled out in-depth training. Screening enables us to identify those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations. Screening is completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development and review process. Policies we propose to adopt will be subject to screening prior to implementation; where there are a series of stages we may screen more than once. The lead officer responsible for putting together the policy and taking the decisions will take the lead role in screening that policy. Screening will also involve other relevant team members, for example, our senior EDI lead, those who implement the policy and staff members from other relevant work areas. Where appropriate we will include key stakeholders in the screening process. The screening process for all policies includes the following:

- The likely impact on those in the Section 75 equality categories
- Opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for those within the Section 75 categories
- The extent to which the policy is likely to impact on good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group
- Opportunities to better promote good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group

To help us answer these questions we gather relevant information and data, both qualitative and quantitative. In taking this into account we consider the different needs, experiences and priorities of the Section 75 equality categories. The screening decision is informed by this evidence. Our screening will lead to three potential outcomes:

- The policy is screened in and needs a full EqlA
- The policy is screened out but needs mitigation or an alternative policy
- The policy is screened out and does not need an EqlA

If our screening concludes that the likely impact is minor, we may decide to carry out a full EqlA anyway; and we will consider potential mitigations and alternative policies. Where we do so we will explain this in the screening assessment. The decision will be discussed with our EDI Senior Lead and signed off at Director level. If the effect is major we will as a rule proceed to a full EqlA. This will be discussed with our EDI Senior Lead and signed off at Director level. If the screening concludes that there is no impact, we will give reasons as to why we are screening the policy out. The assessment will be discussed with our EDI Senior Lead and signed off at Director level. As soon as possible following the completion of the screening process, the screening template, signed off and approved by the senior manager responsible for the policy, will be made available on our website [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk) and on request from: Cahir Hughes Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland 4 Cromac Place The Gasworks Belfast BT7 2JB 0333 103 1928 [inonorthenireland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:inonorthenireland@electoralcommission.org.uk) We will publish a quarterly list of screenings we have carried out on our website and alert our

consultees. Screenings will be made available on request. If a consultee raises a concern about the screening based on supporting evidence, including the ECNI, we will review the screening decision. Our screening reports are published quarterly (see below for details) Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) An EqIA is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy. Its primary function is to determine the extent of any impact on the Section 75 categories and to determine if the impact is an adverse one. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate the likely positive outcomes of a policy and to seek ways to promote more effectively equality of opportunity and good relations. If screening identifies the need for an EqIA, we will carry this out in line with the principles laid down by the ECNI and set out in our own guidance. It will be carried out as part of the policy development process before the policy is adopted and implemented. EqIAs will be subject to consultation as set out in chapter 3 above. We will allow sufficient time for effective consultation and observe the timescales set out in the ECNI's Guide to the Statutory Duties. Our arrangements for publishing the results of screening and EqIAs As set out above, we make publicly available on our website the likely impact of our policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. What we publish Screening reports are published quarterly. Screening reports detail: All policies screened by the Electoral Commission over the three month period A statement of the aim(s) of the policy/policies to which the assessment relates Consideration given to measures which might mitigate any adverse impact Consideration given to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity; Screening decisions, i.e: whether the policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment, whether the policy has been 'screened out' with mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted. whether the policy has been 'screened out' without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted. Where applicable, a timetable for conducting equality impact assessments A link to the completed screening template(s) on our website We will publish a quarterly list of all screenings carried out and alert consultees. Where exceptionally a policy applies only in Northern Ireland we will do this only in Northern Ireland. Conversely where a policy exceptionally does not apply in Northern Ireland we will not follow this procedure. All screening reports will follow our template. For details on the availability of our screening templates please check our screening process . We will publish our EqIAs on our website following our EqIA template and setting out the results of the assessment. Equality impact assessments include: A statement of the aim of the policy assessed Information and data collected Details of the assessment of impact(s) Consideration given to measures which might mitigate any adverse impact Consideration given to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity Consultation responses The decision taken Future monitoring plans How we publish the information All information we publish meets WCAG guidelines and can be made available in alternative formats. Where we publish the information The results of our assessments (screening reports and completed templates, the results of equality impact assessments) are available on our website <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/equality-anddiversity> and by contacting: Cindy Williams The Electoral Commission 3, Bunhill Row London EC1Y 8YZ [edi@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:edi@electoralcommission.org.uk) In addition to the above, screening reports (electronic link or hard copy on request if more suitable for recipients) which include all policies screened over a 3 month period are also sent directly to all NI consultees on a quarterly basis. As set out above we will not do this if, exceptionally, the measures do not apply in NI. We will inform the general public

through communications such as press releases where this is necessary and/or appropriate. Our arrangements for monitoring any adverse impact of policies we have adopted on equality of opportunity Monitoring can help us to deliver better public services and continuous improvements. Monitoring equality information involves the processing of sensitive personal data (data relating to the racial or ethnic origin of individuals, sexual orientation, political opinion, religious belief, etc). To ensure that we monitor information confidentially and effectively we will follow guidance from the Office of the Information Commissioner and the ECNI. We will monitor any adverse impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity of policies we have adopted. We are also committed to monitoring more broadly to identify opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with ECNI guidance. The systems we have established to monitor the impact of policies and identify opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations are: collection, collation and analysis of existing relevant primary and secondary quantitative and qualitative data across all nine equality categories on an on-going basis a review of information and data collected within one year of approval of this equality scheme, to identify the extent of current monitoring and take action to address any gaps in order to have the necessary information on which to base decisions collection of new data if necessary We will revise a policy if over a two year period of monitoring, evaluation shows a greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted and ensure better outcomes for relevant equality groups. We review our equality impact assessment monitoring information on an annual basis. Other monitoring information is reviewed in line with the performance cycle set out in our published Corporate Plan. Our arrangements for publishing the results of our monitoring We will publish the results of our monitoring of adverse impacts of policies we have adopted in a timely manner and welcome feedback to further inform our policy development. However, we are committed to monitoring more broadly and the results of our policy monitoring are published as set out below. EqlA monitoring information is published as part of our Section 75 annual progress report. We will be proactive in announcing the outcomes of our monitoring (which will be in six monthly updates on our website) by contacting consultees in Northern Ireland when these are published. All information published is accessible and can be made available in alternative formats on request.

### Chapter 5: Learning and development for our staff

#### Commitment to staff training

The Commission recognises the value of learning and development in enabling us to be fully aware of and to effectively implement our equality duties. Our Chief Executive has been and remains clear about the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion in line with our statutory duties and as an essential part of the Commission's ethos. To this end we have developed an equality and diversity communications and training programme for all staff at the Commission including our responsibilities under Section 75.

#### Training objectives

Our training arrangements including objectives and monitoring and evaluation arrangements are set out in our EDI Strategy. They are designed to ensure that:

- All staff are aware of the provisions of Section 75 of the 1998 Act, our Equality Scheme commitments and the particular issues likely to affect people across the range of Section 75 categories, to ensure that our staff fully understand their role in implementing the scheme
- Staff engaged in policy assessment through screening and EqlAs are provided with the necessary skills and knowledge
- Staff engaged in dealing with complaints on compliance, consultation and monitoring implementation of the Equality Scheme are provided with the necessary skills and knowledge
- Awareness raising and training

arrangements We have put in place the following arrangements to ensure staff and Board members are aware of and understand our obligations on equality, diversity and inclusion: A summary and access to all key material are easily available on a link from our homepage The full equality scheme is available to all staff through this link Staff were briefed in a session led by the Chief Executive on the draft strategy, and there will be further briefing sessions post approval Material on our statutory obligations and our EDI commitments is included in our induction training Focused training is provided where needed for those working on the implementation of commitments in the Strategy and Scheme Training is provided as appropriate on the issues experienced by those with protected characteristics and identified in Section 75 Our Senior EDI lead ensures that awareness is updated as appropriate on issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion The Board is to be supported by an independent adviser on equalities This programme has been developed in consultation with staff groups such as our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group, our Race at Work Charter Task Force, our Staff Engagement Group and our Dignity, Respect and Empowerment Group. It reflects our learnings from external stakeholders in the course of business. Monitoring and evaluation We evaluate as we would for any learning and development the extent to which participants have built their skills and knowledge; and we monitor numbers trained. The extent to which training arrangements have been met will be reported on as part of the Section 75 annual progress report, which will be sent to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

### Chapter 6: Arrangements for ensuring and assessing public access to information and services we provide

The Commission is committed to ensuring that the information and services we provide are fully accessible to all of our stakeholders across the UK. We keep our arrangements under review to ensure that they remain accessible. We are aware that there are a range of needs for accessible information. People with sensory, learning, communication and mobility disabilities may require printed information in other formats, and we work closely with relevant organisations. Members of ethnic minority groups whose first language is not may have difficulties with information provided in .

### Access to information

To ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information, we provide information in alternative formats such as Braille, EasyRead and audio format (such as CD, MP3 or DAISY) and in minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom is not their first language on request where reasonably practicable, and will ensure a reasonable alternative is provided if we cannot meet a request. We will respond to such requests within a month where possible in line with our response to all requests. We will liaise with representatives of young people, disability and minority ethnic organisations and take account of existing/developing good practice and work in partnership with them to develop the best ways of reaching such groups. We will advertise in a range of media as appropriate. Our website is WCAG compliant.

### Access to services

Democracy is for us all, and we are committed to ensuring that all our services are fully accessible to everyone with protected characteristics or within Section 75. We adhere to the relevant provisions of current anti-discrimination legislation. We have set out in our EDI Strategy our arrangements for ensuring that all of our services are fully accessible to customers and stakeholders. We make access recommendations and work with others to remove barriers as part of our work to ensure that everyone who is eligible is able to participate in the democratic process. We identify groups who are less likely to have access to democracy and undertake a range of initiatives to target them such as campaigns and partnership working.

### Assessing public access to information and services

We monitor access to our information and services annually in all our work to ensure we promote



equality of opportunity and good relations. We ensure that these aspects are covered in our regular programme of research and monitoring such as: access audits, website audits, monitoring requests for information in alternative formats, monitoring complaints, seeking feedback, including relevant questions about access to information and services in service user surveys, engagement with stakeholders etc.

**Chapter 7: Timetable for measures proposed** A Timetable for measures proposed is at Appendix 4 of this Scheme. These have been reflected in our operational and business planning. We have set out in our Action Plan for the Strategy and in the Timetable attached to this Scheme the actions we propose to take and when.

**Chapter 8: Our complaints procedure** We are here to serve the public We are here to serve the public, and will endeavour to resolve all complaints made to us. If anyone believes that they have been directly affected by a failure of the Electoral Commission to comply with our approved equality scheme in relation to our equality duties in Northern Ireland, they are invited to complain to the Head of Office, Northern Ireland. Cahir Hughes Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland 4 Cromac Place The Gasworks Belfast BT7 2JB 0333 103 1928 [inonorthenireland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:inonorthenireland@electoralcommission.org.uk) We will in the first instance acknowledge receipt of each complaint on the same working day it is received. We aim to respond to complaints within 20 working days, and will contact you if we cannot meet this deadline. We will carry out an internal investigation of the complaint and respond within twenty working days. If the complaint is complex enough to need more time, this period will be extended to two months and the complainant advised within one month of the original complaint. The complainant will be kept informed of progress. If the complaint has not been resolved within a reasonable timescale, we will advise the complainant that the complaint can be brought to the ECNI. The Electoral Commission will co-operate fully with any subsequent investigation by the ECNI on any breach of relevant statute, and will provide access in a timely manner to any relevant documentation that the Commission may require. We will make all efforts to implement promptly and in full any recommendations arising out of any ECNI investigation.

**Chapter 9: Publication of the Single Equality Scheme** Our Equality Scheme is available on our website [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk), and free of charge including in alternative formats from Cahir Hughes Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland 4 Cromac Place The Gasworks Belfast BT7 2JB 0333 103 1928 [inonorthenireland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:inonorthenireland@electoralcommission.org.uk) We will make the following arrangements for publication: We will make every effort to communicate our scheme widely, for example through social media and partnership working We will e-mail a link to the scheme to the consultees set out at Annex E; and we will respond to requests for the scheme in an alternative format in a timely manner. Other consultees without email will be notified by letter that the scheme is available on request. Our Scheme is available on request in alternative formats such as Braille, EasyRead, large print, audio formats; and in minority languages Stakeholders A list of our stakeholders and consultees can be found annexed to the EDI Strategy, on our website and by contacting us using the details given above. This scheme will be made available in a range of accessible formats. We will directly consult and inform our equality consultees and stakeholders through a range of channels.

**Chapter 10: Review of our Equality Scheme** As required under Schedule 9 paragraph 8 (3) of the 1998 Act, we will conduct a review of this Equality Scheme. This review will take place within five years of submission to the ECNI but could be carried out within a shorter timescale. We will review our Action Plan yearly. The review will evaluate the effectiveness of our

Scheme in relation to the implementation of the section 75 duties relevant to our functions in Northern Ireland. In undertaking this review we will follow any guidance issued by the ECNI. A report of this review will be made public in the same way as the Scheme and sent to the ECNI. Appendix Appendix Appendix 1: organisation chart Learn about our Executive Team and Senior Leadership team . Appendix 2: groups relevant to Section 75 categories This list is illustrative, not exhaustive.

Religious belief: Buddhist; Catholic; Hindu; Jewish; Muslims; people of no religious belief; Protestants; Sikh; other faiths. For the purposes of Section 75 the term “religious belief” is the same definition as that used in the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order, 1998. Therefore “religious belief” also includes any perceived religious belief or lack of belief and, in employment situations only, also covers any “similar philosophical belief” Political opinion: Nationalist generally; Unionists generally; members/supporters of other political parties. For the purposes of Section 75 the term “political opinion” is the same definition as that used in the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. Therefore “political opinion” also includes any perceived political opinion or lack of opinion Racial group: Black people; Chinese people; Indians; Pakistanis;; people of mixed ethnic background; Polish; Roma; Travellers; White people; people of other racial groups Men and women generally: Men (including boys); Trans-gendered people; Transsexual people; women (including girls) Marital status: Civil partners with people in civil partnerships; divorced people; married people; separated people; single people; widowed people Age: Children and young people; older people Persons with a disability: Persons with disabilities as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Persons with dependants: Persons with personal responsibility for the care of a child; for the care of a person with a disability; for the care of a dependent older person Sexual orientation: Bisexual people; heterosexual people; gay or lesbian people Appendix 3: List of consultees in Northern Ireland A list of consultees in Northern Ireland can be found as part of the wider list of consultees annexed to the EDI Strategy. Appendix 4: Timetable for measures proposed Measure Lead responsibility Timetable Section 75 Annual Progress Report Senior EDI lead and Head of Electoral Commission in NI 31 August (annually) Action Plan: Produce Consult Publish Monitor progress and update plan Senior EDI lead and Head of Electoral Commission in NI Production: Nov 2021 Consultation: Nov 2021 to February 2022 Spring 2022 Annually Consultation: Review and update consultation lists Senior EDI Lead working with colleagues across the four nations of the UK Annually Screening: Timetable Reports Relevant policy leads and directors Relevant policy leads and directors As required by business As produced and quarterly EqlAs: Timetable Publication Relevant policy leads and directors As required by business As required by business and annually Monitoring: Review of monitoring information Publication of monitoring information Senior EDI lead Annually Included in annual S.75 progress report Training: Summary Training programme Focused training Update training Evaluate training Senior EDI lead working with colleagues in Internal Comms and L&D leadership Once scheme published 2022 As required Annually On completion of training Assessing access to information and services: Monitoring of access Senior EDI lead working with colleagues in Research Annually as part of S75 progress report Communication of equality scheme Notification of consultees (9.3) Senior EDI lead working with Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland Within three months of approval Review of equality scheme Senior EDI Lead working with Head of Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland Within five years of submission Appendix 5: Glossary AA Web Content Guidelines 1.0 These guidelines set out how to make our website accessible to people

with disabilities Adverse Impact Where a group of people protected by equality law has been affected differently by a policy and the effect is less favourable, it is known as adverse impact CEO Chief Electoral Officer Commission The Electoral Commission Consultation Our equality consultation involves asking our stakeholders (i.e., service users, staff, the general public) for their views on how best to design policies that promote equality Due regard To properly consider the need to promote equality, taking into account our purpose and the need to spend public money effectively EAA Equality impact assessment An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is a tool to ensure we don't exclude anybody from accessing our services or those that we play a part in delivering. It's also a chance to explore ways to promote equality ERO Electoral Registration Officer Great Britain England, Scotland and Wales HR Human resources IER Individual electoral registration Policy The term policy covers the definition and process of how an organisation carries out its functions, for example in reaching decisions Protected Groups Refers to the characteristics of people legally protected from discrimination PPE Act Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 PPERA Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 RCO Referendum Counting Officer RO Returning Officer Schedule 9 Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 sets out detailed provisions for the enforcement of the Section 75 statutory duties, including an outline of what should be included in an equality scheme Screening The procedure for identifying which policies will be subject to equality impact assessment, and how these equality impact assessments will be prioritised Definition of the characteristics of people protected from discrimination in the UK Age: Under Chapter 1 of the Equalities Act 2010 this refers to persons defined by age group, whether a particular age or a range of ages. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act guidance 1 proposes that for most purposes, the main categories are: those under 18; people aged between 18 and 65; and people over 65. However, the definition of age groups will relate to the policy under consideration. Disability: Under Chapter 1 of the Equalities Act 2010 a person has a disability if s/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Gender reassignment: Under Chapter 1 of the Equalities Act this refers to people who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process or part of a process for the purpose of reassigning their sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex. A reference to a transsexual person is a person who has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment. Marriage and Civil Partnership: Under the Equality Act 2010 civil partners must be treated the same as married couples on a wide range of legal matters. 'Status' can refer to whether a person is single, divorced or separated, married or in a civil partnership. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act guidance refers to married people; unmarried people; divorced or separate people; and widowed people. Pregnancy and maternity: Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after birth, and includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding. Race: Race is defined in the Equality Act 2010 as including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins. Religion: Religion has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Sex is defined in the Equality Act 2010 as referring to men and women. Sexual Orientation is defined in the Equality Act 2010 as referring to whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes. People with dependants: Section 75

of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 guidance defines this group as: people with a primary responsibility for: a child; a person with a disability; a dependent elderly person. Political opinion: Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 guidance defines political opinion as: Unionists generally; Nationalists generally; members/supporters of any political party; other. Language: In compliance with the Welsh Language Act 1993 and the Welsh Language Measure 2011, this consideration refers to a group of people defined by the language they speak. In Wales we have a duty to provide services in Welsh and as set out in the Welsh Language Standards.

Appendix 6: Action Plan This forms Chapter 8 of the EDI Strategy. 1. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1988. A Guide for Public Authorities April 2005 and April 2010 ■ [Back to content at footnote 1](#) [Page history](#) First published: 22 September 2022 Last updated: 13 September 2023 Related content [Report: Voting in 2017](#) [Read our report about voting at the general election in 2017](#) [Testing the EU referendum question](#) [Find out about our testing of the EU referendum question](#) [Report: How the 2017 UK general election was run](#) [Read our report about how the 2017 general election was run](#) [Results and turnout at the 2017 UK general election](#) [View the results and turnout at the 2017 general election](#)