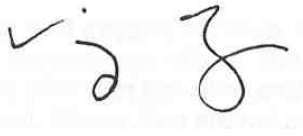


# The Electoral Commission

## Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report

### Contact:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and Equality Scheme</li></ul>	Name: Julie Howell Telephone: Click or tap here to enter text. Email: JHowell@electoralcommission.org.uk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Disability Action Plan</li></ul>	As above <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Name: Click or tap here to enter text. Telephone: Click or tap here to enter text. Email: Click or tap here to enter text.
Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:	<a href="#">Single Equalities Scheme for Northern Ireland</a> Click or tap here to enter text.
<b>Signature:</b> 	Vijay Rangarajan Chief Executive

**This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.**

**It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.**

**This report reflects progress made between April 2023 and March 2024**

## **PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme**

### **Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice**

- 1 In 2023-24, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

*Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.*

The Electoral Commission is an independent public body that oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. Our aim is to make democracy accessible to everyone. The Commission is focused on prioritising Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) with three key strategic EDI objectives outlined below -

- Ensure that everyone who is eligible to participate in the democratic process can do so.
- Embed EDI in everything we do and treat our customers and partners fairly and with respect and have transparent decision-making.
- Provide equality of opportunity for everyone – treat staff fairly and with respect.

As our workforce grows (approx. 190 staff at the end of the reporting period) we strive to be an employer of choice - attracting, retaining and developing diverse talent from across the UK, with EDI featuring throughout our People Strategy.

**Examples of key policy developments include -**

#### **Implementation of the EDI strategy and NI Equality Scheme 2022-2027**

- Creation of a sub-committee to the Board in March 2023, focused on providing accountability for the delivery of the EDI strategy action plan. This was one of the recommendations made by the Independent Advisor to the Board, who had been appointed to bring diversity of thinking and representation to the Board and to advise on improving the governance of EDI. Outcome - the sub-committee is now well established with an agreed terms of reference and forward plan focusing on priority areas – Disability and Race.
- Identified disability and race as priority areas – using staff survey results, external data/surveys & insights from staff groups to ensure an evidence-based approach. This will see targeted activities, as recommended by the Disability Confident Scheme and Race At Work Charter, featuring on the revised action plan. The aim will be to improve outcomes for these groups. This approach was supported by the Executive Team and ratified by the EDI Committee in December 2023.
- Reviewed the current EDI Strategy Action plan and Disability Action plan, based on advice received from the ECNI. Review included engagement with action owners, plan updated with revised activities promoting equal opportunities and anticipated outcomes/improvements. Executive Team approval was obtained in March 2024. EDI committee also provided their support to the revised Plan.

Improvements achieved – Teams are aware of their responsibilities within the Action Plan, as it is now more meaningful, action-orientated, evidence-based and outcome-focused (*see appendix one*).

### **Implementation of the People Strategy 2022-2025**

A project board oversees the delivery of four commitments that set out the priority areas, according to insights and staff survey results – EDI was one of the four commitments. This saw a series of initiatives introduced during the period -

- Launched a new staff induction programme early 2024 - This was designed with EDI in mind. New starters are provided with information about our legislative requirements, EDI commitments and membership with Inclusive Employers (outcomes –55 people have attended the induction in the reporting period with some joining the EDI staff group and signing up with Inclusive Employers, as a result).
- Updated our recruitment policy– following several months of research including analysing findings from the 2022 recruitment review, scrutinising current challenges in our recruitment processes and consultations with HR, ET, SLT, the EDI Group and PCS Union – we launched the new recruitment policy in August 2023. The outcome of which is to improve advice for hiring managers so that selection processes are more streamlined, inclusive and accessible. Outcomes include advertising our roles on a more diverse range of websites, such as Diversity Jobsite, Overlooked Talent, LGBT Equality, Ethnic Jobsite, Disability Jobsite, Britain Inclusive, Asian jobsite and we also make sure we advertise in Northern Ireland by using Clarendon Executive, NI Jobs and NI JobFinder. 44 people have been recruited in the period from across the UK.
- Introduced mandatory recruitment training – this training is for everyone involved in hiring new staff including unconscious bias, our legal responsibilities and how to conduct fair recruitment to ensure that panels are aware of their biases and requirement to be equitable and have inclusive processes. (Outcomes – 23 people have completed training)
- Updated recruitment tools - HR has revised the job description template and produced accompanying guidance, making the interview record form more accessible and created an interview question bank with specific questions on EDI. One of the key benefits of this is that we are better able to recruit staff who have a good understanding of EDI and can demonstrate their commitment to it.
- Implementing a new HR System- work has been ongoing to design a system built for our specific needs to provide an improved reporting functionality across the HR and recruitment systems and the opportunity to review how we collect and store EDI data.
  - Phase 1 (will launch in July 2024) – this will allow HR to monitor staff equality monitoring data providing us with an evidence base to identify

gaps and determine appropriate initiatives. In the period, we consulted with staff groups for feedback to develop the equality monitoring data, using research and best practice, including advice from the ECNI, to finalise these.

- Phase 2 (will launch late 2024) – this will include being able to track the candidate journey from the application process through the recruitment process and beyond, to monitor success rates and trends for under-represented groups.
- Introduced EDI objectives for all staff – We have embedded the new culture charter and our commitment by introducing set EDI objectives in individual performance reviews, with support from the EDI group and the newly rebranded Workplace Behaviour Team. We will maximise and value the range of people in our workforce so that everyone feels respected at work. Outcome - we will provide an inclusive and supportive working environment where all colleagues are treated with equality, dignity and respect and where everyone is treated fairly and has equal opportunities.
- Carried out the annual people survey – shared internally with an email sent from the Chief Executive to encourage participation (achieved 85% response rate). Results are discussed at EDI committee meeting and other Board meetings, as well as in teams to agree what priorities need to be addressed. Improvements in results will form part of the revised EDI action plan to enable progress to be monitored and tracked. Survey includes a specific section on EDI, as well as other relevant questions, ensuring that EDI are embedded as a firm commitment and progress can be measured year on year. The survey also allows for results to be analysed against certain equality categories, including race, sexual orientation, sex and age. Whilst not compulsory, this has provided the opportunity to monitor responses from underrepresented groups.
- Developed our online recruitment pages - HR, together with the Digital Communications Team, have improved the '[Working for us](#)' page on the Commission's website to make it more attractive and engaging to a wider range of prospective applicants. It highlights our membership with Inclusive Employers and that we are Disability Confident – Committed. It includes what makes the Commission a great place to work, with staff testimonials promoting the benefits and opportunities available. The new page is more engaging and accessible. It highlights benefits such as flexible and home working, links to our Culture Charter, People Strategy and EDI strategy, emphasising the message that we are an inclusive organisation. We also added the following statement to every job advertisement –
  - *We want to attract the broadest range of talented people who are passionate about democracy. The more diverse our workforce, the better we can adapt to and reflect the needs of society. We welcome applications from all backgrounds and as a staff member you will become part of an inclusive culture, where you will have the opportunity*

*to achieve your full potential and enhance your career through learning and development.*

### **Equality Impact Screening Guidance**

- Improved our equality impact screening process – We conducted a post-implementation review of the guidance and template in December 2023 and made improvements reflecting feedback from users and consultation with the EDI staff group. Improvements include using hyperlinks to relevant data and legislation, use of plain English and removal of acronyms. A simplified screening template and guidance document was developed to reflect improvements, which will see better quality screenings conducted.
- Raised awareness of the need for equality screenings - The EDI Lead has continued to raise awareness of the importance of equality screening policy decisions and to continue to monitor adverse impacts. This has taken place during team meetings and the creation of a dedicated EDI hub on the Commission’s intranet to provide staff with the information and resources they need regarding the new guidance and template, as well as links to ECNI’s website and training videos. Feedback has been received to say that the updated guidance and templates are easier to understand and complete. Training will be developed and included in next year’s report.

### **Examples of key service delivery developments include –**

#### **Outreach, Engagement and Events**

- Worked with youth representatives across the UK - It is essential that young people who participate in the four Youth Voice panels that we deliver in partnership with youth organisation in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland represent the range of communities we work with. We work directly with young people, aged 12-18, who have a varied understanding of democracy in the UK and have diverse lived experiences, including a mix of urban and rural locations. We routinely invite these young people to attend ad hoc events. We also provide resources ([click here](#)) that have been specifically designed for young people, giving them confidence to participate and knowledge of how to vote. The outcome will be that more young people will actively participate in democracy.
  - We extended our ‘youth voice’ work by building relationships with partners and youth organisations in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to ensure our work on registration and voting reflects the needs and views of young people. Contracts were awarded to four organisations - I Have a Voice, Children in Scotland, Children in Wales, and the Northern Irish Youth Forum. Youth groups were consulted on key messaging targeting young people, providing useful insight and feedback.

- Our youth voice champions told us what they thought the theme for ‘Welcome to Your Vote Week 2024’ should be. We heard a range of ideas, but they all had something in common – knowing that every voice, and every vote, matters. The resulting theme, ‘Your Voice Matters’, encouraged young people to get involved in democracy. Our youth voice panel members also provided invaluable feedback on the voter registration public awareness campaign which we developed ahead of local elections in May 2024.
- Hosted a workshop on youth participation – We hosted an event in Cardiff in November 2023, where members of our Welsh Youth Voice Panel met with Commissioners and took part in a workshop on improving the participation of young people in democracy.
- Ran our Welcome to Your Vote week awareness campaign – In January 2024, we organised our annual awareness week, the theme for 2024 was ‘Your Voice Matters.’ Thirty-five young people attended the launch and feedback included ‘*I understand more about democracy and politics and feel more confident about it*’ and ‘*[I really enjoyed] being able to hear about others’ opinions and receiving more information about democracy.*’ The students also had the opportunity to participate in a Q&A with Florance Eshalomi MP (then Shadow Minister for Democracy). She spoke candidly about her experiences as an MP and told stories from her education and growing up in Brixton. She encouraged the young people to register, vote and to have their voices heard.
- We worked with local councils and civil society organisations to support voters less likely to have an accepted form of ID, highlighting the availability of the free ID and encouraging them to apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate before the deadline.
- We targeted under-represented groups with our public awareness campaigns. We design our public media campaigns targeting groups we know are less likely to be registered and who face barriers to voting. These groups include young people; recent movers; people experiencing homelessness; people with access needs including those with learning disabilities; Muslim women; Gypsy, Roma, Traveller; and LGBTQIA+ communities.
  - Ahead of local elections in May 2023, we co-created resources with our civil society organisation partners which specifically addressed the needs of under-registered groups and those facing barriers to voting. With input from caseworkers and services users, these resources provided targeted information on registration and complying with the new requirement to show photo ID to vote at polling stations. Working with partners, we proactively provided resources in a range of accessible formats including Braille, Easy Read, audio and large print, and we ran training sessions for partners to build capacity and ensure case workers were confident when giving advice to the people they

support. We continued to strengthen our networks to ensure we disseminated these resources to the people that need them. With a detailed knowledge of their residents, our local council partners also played a crucial role disseminating these resources.

- Outcome - Over half a million applications were received to register to vote during the Commission's campaign ahead of the May 2023 elections in England and Northern Ireland. Details of the applications and targets below -

	<b>Lower Target</b>	<b>Central Target</b>	<b>Upper target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>% difference (central target)</b>
<b>England</b>	256,923	285,470	314,017	557,156	+95%
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	62,696	69,662	76,628	33,530	-52%

- In 2023, applications received during the campaign in England were almost double the target (557,156 vs. 285,470, a percentage difference of +95%). In Northern Ireland, the central target (which was set in line with the level of applications received during the 2019 campaign) was missed by -52% (33,530 vs. 69,662). This may be a consequence of the fact that the 2021 canvass in Northern Ireland had already driven a high level of applications and so fewer voters needed to register ahead of the 2023 polls.
- Data from before the campaign launched (pre-wave) and after the campaign finished (post-wave) for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups showed
  - Seen or heard advertising/publicity/information on registering to vote: 41% (pre-wave) to 62% (post-wave)
  - Seen on broadcast TV: 15% to 26%
  - Definitely registered to vote: 62% to 64%
- Continued to hold regular meetings with the Northern Ireland Assembly Parties' Panel (NIAPP) - meetings take place every quarter and EDI has been added as a standing item to the agenda with guest speakers invited to discuss an EDI topic every meeting. This provides the opportunity to increase awareness of relevant and emerging issues with the NI Electoral Office and Political Parties in NI. Examples include –
  - October 2023 - Executive Office's Racial Subgroup Committee were invited to discuss migrant and ethnic minority community representation and access to voting/elections
  - January 2024 - Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People attended the NIAPP to coincide with Welcome To Your Vote Week and to discuss young people's experiences around voting

- March 2024 - representatives from Guide Dogs NI attended and shared their lived experience on barriers to voting independently and in secret, including providing party manifestos in accessible formats and accessibility at unfamiliar polling stations.

### **Accessible registration and voting**

- Published public opinion data on satisfaction with the electoral process - Key findings from our [public opinion poll](#) published in December last year showed that people in Northern Ireland have slightly lower satisfaction with the electoral process than the other UK nations, the gap has been decreasing in recent years (3% lower than England in 2022 compared to a 21% gap in 2019). At the time of the poll, Voter ID had not been introduced in Great Britain and it showed that people who did not have recognisable photo ID were more likely to be from disadvantaged groups, such as those who are renting from their local authority (17% of whom did not have the correct ID), those renting from a housing association (10%), those who are unemployed (14%), those from lower social grades (8% of those who are DE social grade), and those with lower levels of education (7%).
- Published our assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers – Our [accuracy and completeness research](#) was published in September 2023. It looked at the register in NI and identified under-registered groups. The changes in Northern Ireland bring levels of accuracy and completeness broadly into line with England, Scotland and Wales; both are at the highest levels we have recorded through these research studies. These improvements are the direct result of the recent 2021 canvass in Northern Ireland, something we also saw following the previous canvass in 2013.
- Continued to support the delivery of elections - In Northern Ireland, we continue to work closely with the Chief Electoral Officer to support the smooth running of elections. Examples include, hosting events and observing at elections and counts to ensure effective implementation of our guidance, particularly on accessibility at polling stations.
- With the introduction of the Elections Act 2022 we shared details of the new accessibility rules with voters, which saw that voters with disabilities have greater choice about who can accompany them in the polling station and more assistance available to them.
- Developed targeted support for these under-represented groups and others facing barriers to participation - we are committed to ensuring that implementation of our activities mitigates any negative impacts on groups of individuals who share protected characteristics.
  - Our support, which includes resources for schools, local authorities and civil society organisations on voter ID, explain how to register and cast your vote. Many of these resources include information tailored to specific groups with protected characteristics, such as learning



disabilities, trans and non-binary people, directly informed by our engagement with civil society organisations who represent them.

- In addition, we produce resources in accessible formats including Braille and Easy Read to further support disabled people to take part in elections. These resources have been well received, with 100% of those partners who responded to our post-poll survey on the May 2023 local elections in England telling us they ‘agreed’ that our resources ‘made it easier for the people (they) support to apply’ for free voter ID.
- The support we offer also includes online briefings, and ahead of the UK Parliament general election we worked with the Royal National Institute for Deaf people (RNID) to produce a Q&A on voter registration and voter ID in BSL. This was shared with their members and wider network to further support Deaf voters to participate. We are currently working with RNID to improve our provision of information in BSL and ISL.
- Provided guidance on support for disabled voters - Under the Elections Act 2022, we have a duty to provide guidance to Returning Officers (ROs) on the requirement to provide reasonable equipment to assist disabled voters in polling stations. Our guidance was updated to include what support could be provided in polling stations to enable, or make it easier, for disabled people to vote independently and in secret, but awareness among voters of what is available continues to be low. We worked hard to prepare voters, administrators and the wider electoral community for further changes resulting from the Elections Act, including providing guidance and resources around online absent vote applications and the extension of the overseas voter franchise. We will monitor the effectiveness of our work and report the outcomes in next year’s report.
- Reported on the elections in England and Northern Ireland - We published election reports for England and [Northern Ireland](#), assessing how the May 2023 elections ([post-poll NI data](#)) were run.
  - Our report on the May 2023 elections in NI found that 80% of people thought the elections were well-run however, despite a targeted campaign to raise awareness of the Digital Registration Number (DRN) 43% of people who registered online say they can’t remember receiving a DRN and 56% say they would not be confident accessing their DRN. This continues to be a barrier for some voters, with over 5,000 postal and proxy applications being rejected due to missing DRNs.
  - As a result of the findings of this report, we made a number of recommendations including that the UK Government urgently reviews the operation of the DRN to ensure that these barriers are removed, while also maintaining the integrity of the absent voting process and in response to candidate intimidation and abuse, the electoral community should take action to protect voter trust and confidence in the

democratic system (for further details please see the attached report in full).

### **Transparent political campaigning and political finance**

- Published guidance on [candidate intimidation in NI](#) – We developed guidance in conjunction with the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Evidence from our candidate research found that women, ethnically diverse and LGBT+ candidates are more likely to be subject to abuse.
- Began development of a Code of Conduct for campaigners in NI – the consultation process was initiated in the reporting period, but this work was paused due to the General Election. It will be included in the next annual progress report.
- Published our report on [Electoral registration in Great Britain](#) in 2023 - It continues to be a challenge to reach communities who have historically been reluctant to engage with canvassers. Densely populated urban areas with high rates of population movement appear to be the most challenging areas. Some Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) are choosing to target their door-knocking efforts only in these locations. However, data from previous years demonstrates that even that is not universally successful.
  - We will focus our analysis of the Route 2 data over the coming years to further develop our understanding of the challenges faced by EROs and to support the identification of actions to help mitigate against the risks to the accuracy and completeness of their electoral registers.
  - We will also undertake work with smaller groups of EROs to facilitate the sharing of good practice between those facing similar challenges.
- Media engagement plan has been developed to address intimidation of candidates. Research on the May 2023 elections shows that 36% of candidates who responded said they had some kind of problem with abuse, intimidation or harassment. This rose to 55% when shown a list of harassment scenarios. The problem is particularly acute among women candidates and those from an ethnic minority. We will advocate for the safety of candidates and campaigners, provide them with guidance and highlight the challenges they face and the detrimental impact this has on our democracy.

### **Resilient local electoral services**

- Worked with local authorities in Great Britain to support their delivery of elections - Raising awareness and monitoring performance standards, to support and challenge [Returning Officers](#) (ROs) to deliver services that have equality impacts in mind. We ensure that support is provided when

planning for and delivering elections. This includes ensuring that everyone who is eligible and wants to vote and/or stand for election, can do so and has confidence in the process.

### **Modern and sustainable electoral system**

- Maintained our contingency plans - We continued to maintain contingency plans which includes guidance on accessibility for unscheduled electoral events, including a UK parliamentary general election and a Northern Ireland Assembly election. We developed and monitored a risk register in respect of planning for the UK General Election to ensure that equality impacts were considered consistently as part of decision making.

- 2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2023-24 (or append the plan with progress/examples identified).

**Objective 1 - EDI in the democratic process**

Outcomes	Activities
<p>To maximise the number of people who can participate in the democratic process by understanding the issues and barriers people encounter throughout the democratic process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research published on <a href="#">voter experience</a> in March 2023 which focused on awareness levels of registering to vote and the enablers and barriers to registration.</li> <li>• Reported on the experiences of those participating in elections, recommending improvements to partners and stakeholders. This included data from our post-election Public Opinion survey, the sample for which included a disability boost of 500 people in England, and 300 in NI, who identified themselves as limited a lot or a lot by a health condition.</li> <li>• We ensure all agencies we work with have signed up to the Market Research Society EDI Code of Conduct, which emphasises the importance of diversity and inclusion, ensuring that research practices are fair and equitable for all participants.</li> </ul>
<p>To improve accessibility for voters and raise awareness of support available.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We published accessibility guidance and advice for electoral administrators</li> <li>• We provided public information support via website, email, telephone and in accessible formats.</li> <li>• We conducted accessibility surveys, and improved website functionality- see <a href="#">accessibility statement from website</a>.</li> <li>• We set standards and monitor the performance of Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) through our performance standards framework.</li> <li>• We shared information with voters regarding the voting and registration process, via our multimedia public awareness campaigns.</li> </ul>

<p>To maximise the number of people who know how to register and vote.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted multi-media public awareness campaigns are designed with under-represented groups in mind, such as young people, those with learning disabilities and ethnic minority communities.</li> </ul>
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**Objective 2 – Embed EDI in everything we do and make changes, because of engagement with our stakeholders and partners.**

<p>To increase trust and confidence amongst under-represented groups of candidates, campaigners and parties in the electoral system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Met with representatives from various political parties and UK Police Forces to discuss intimidation in politics.</li> <li>• Ongoing engagement with the Jo Cox foundation to address the issue of candidate intimidation.</li> <li>• Northern Ireland Assembly Parties’ Panel held quarterly to provide information and discuss issues affecting candidates.</li> </ul>
<p>To ensure the contractors we use are committed to EDI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the period, we procured the services of AKD Solutions to deliver EDI training to staff. They were selected as part of our commitment to the Race at Work Charter, as they are a small black-owned and London-based change consultancy. Positive feedback has been received on the training delivered.</li> </ul>

**Objective 3 – Equality of Opportunity for all staff**

<p>To support equality of opportunity and foster good relations for staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We continue to work to fulfil our commitments to the Race at Work Charter and Disability Confident Scheme. These activities have been included in the revised EDI action plan to ensure continuing commitment.</li> <li>• EDI training plan including menopause awareness sessions, Equally Yours pilot (see appendix two for numbers of staff who have attended sessions).</li> <li>• ‘Power Sessions’ on managing stress, how to delegate, how to be more resilient and</li> </ul>
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	<p>managing burnout are being delivered as part of the L&amp;D framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication - a weekly newsletter is issued to all staff that includes information about upcoming campaigns and events. Inclusion activity features prominently within these newsletters and covers the launch of new initiatives, forthcoming events and celebrating successes. We also shared our strategy and action plan, along with updates on progress of these with all colleagues online.</li> <li>• EDI is the responsibility of all leaders, included in performance management objectives and commitment to zero tolerance of harassment and bullying.</li> <li>• The Commission shares information on a range of inclusion and diversity topics, consistently throughout the year to all staff.</li> <li>• An Inclusion Calendar was launched in September 2023 after consulting with the EDI staff group and using employee data to determine which calendar events to acknowledge, with staff sharing their lived experience and personal stories about a range of events including Diwali; International Women’s Day; Passover; d/Deaf awareness week; Ramadan and Black History Month.</li> <li>• EDI objective in performance review – mandatory for everyone as part of the new Performance Management system to ensure staff see EDI as their responsibility.</li> <li>• Initiatives to address under-representation include – mandatory unconscious bias training for all recruitment panels (introduced January 2024 – 23 people had completed this in the reporting period), updating welcome statements in advertisements, widening the range of recruitment agencies used for senior roles.</li> <li>• Promoting HR policies – family friendly policy including parental leave, attendance management, flexible</li> </ul>
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	<p>working, menopause and special leave are included on the HR pages of the intranet.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Commission is committed to facilitating flexible working such as staggered hours, part-time hours or condensed hours where possible to support home and work life, this is most helpful for those staff with caring responsibilities or those impacted by health or disability considerations.</li><li>• We know that working flexibly is an important benefit for staff which is why we continue to operate a hybrid working arrangement that also be combined with other kinds of flexible working.</li><li>• Membership with Inclusive Employers (we joined in January 2024 with 38 people registered by the end of the reporting period) – Provides access to EDI resources, weekly webinars (14 people attended webinars in the period) blogs and training. Feedback includes <i>'I love inclusive employers. Their webinars have always been so informative and the presenters are so knowledgeable! They are such a useful tool to have access to as an organisation'</i> and <i>'I went to the Inclusive Employers session earlier and it was great! Some sobering stats but inspiring stories too'</i>.</li><li>• Pay review (HR) – independent review is underway and engagement with all staff is ongoing.</li><li>• Induction programme redesigned with EDI in mind – includes information about our statutory requirements and commitment to EDI. 55 people have attended this in the reporting period.</li></ul>
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PART A

**3** Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2023-24 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes                       No (go to Q.4)                       Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

**3a** With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

**3b** What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? *(tick all that apply)*

As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy *(please give details):*

As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise *(please give details):*

As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact *(please give details):*

As a result of changes to access to information and services *(please specify and give details):*

Other *(please specify and give details):*



## Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures

### Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

- 4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)
- Yes, organisation wide
  - Yes, some departments/jobs
  - No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
  - No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
  - Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

All staff in the Commission are expected to adhere to our Section 75 statutory duties under equalities legislation. All advertised job roles include a welcome statement

*We want to attract the broadest range of talented people who are passionate about democracy. The more diverse our workforce, the better we can adapt to and reflect the needs of society. We welcome applications from all backgrounds and as a staff member you will become part of an inclusive culture, where you will have the opportunity to achieve your full potential and enhance your career through learning and development.*

- 5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)
- Yes, organisation wide
  - Yes, some departments/jobs
  - No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
  - No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
  - Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Our guidance for corporate planning required Directorates to include appropriate objectives on EDI. The objectives were written during this reporting period and will be monitored via our performance monitoring system for subsequent years.

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6 In the 2023-24 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? *(tick all that apply)*

- Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan
- Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- Yes, in some departments/jobs
- No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan
- No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2023-24 report
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The revised EDI action plan and People Strategy have been developed with objectives and performance measures. Reporting and progress is tracked via our performance management system, Pentana, as part of monitoring the delivery of our operational plans. The sub-committee to the Board has been established and is also responsible for monitoring our progress against the EDI action plan.

**Equality action plans/measures**

7 Within the 2023-24 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:	<input type="text"/>	Actions ongoing:	<input type="text"/>	Actions to commence:	<input type="text"/>
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Please provide any details and examples *(in addition to question 2)*:

8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2023-24 reporting period *(points not identified in an appended plan)*:

- See appendix one for revised plan

9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2023-24 reporting period, the following have been identified: *(tick all that apply)*

- Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality

PART A

- Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
- Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
- Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

**Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)**

**10** Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: *(tick one box only)*

- All the time                       Sometimes                       Never

**11** Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2023-24 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

In [our report](#) on the May 2023 Local Government elections in Northern Ireland, we recommended that the Chief Electoral Officer, working in consultation with political parties and the Electoral Commission, should review and update the Code of Conduct. In the period we launched a consultation on the draft Code of Conduct for Campaigners in Northern Ireland. We are consulting with all registered political parties in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Assembly Parties Panel, the Information Commissioner's Office, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Office on these proposals.

All political parties have previously agreed to a Code of Conduct for canvassing in the vicinity of polling stations. This Code provides a guide on what is considered acceptable behaviour. However, it has been some time since it was reviewed. Also, its scope is limited to campaigning in the vicinity of polling stations. Elsewhere in the UK, political parties have agreed to a code that also covers campaigning in the community in the run up to polling day. The consultation was due to close on 12 April, however this was postponed in light of the UK parliamentary general election.

**12** In the 2023-24 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used by consultees**: *(tick all that apply)*

- Face to face meetings
- Focus groups
- Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing
- Questionnaires

PART A

- Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation
- Internet discussions
- Telephone consultations
- Other (*please specify*):

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

Consultation was delayed but responses would be mostly sent by email.

**13** Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes       No       Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

**14** Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes       No       Not applicable – no commitment to review

**Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)**

[Register of Equality Impact Assessment screenings](#)

**15** Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year (*as recorded in screening reports*):

7
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**16** Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2023-24:

PART A

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | Policy consultations conducted with <b>screening</b> assessment presented.                 |
|   | Policy consultations conducted <b>with an equality impact assessment (EQIA)</b> presented. |
|   | Consultations for an <b>EQIA</b> alone.  |

**17** Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

The consultation exercise had been paused after the announcement of the UK General Election.

**18** Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes                       No concerns were raised                       No                       Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

**Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)**

**19** Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes                       No                       Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

**Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)**

**20** From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes     No, already taken place

PART A

No, scheduled to take place at a later date

Not applicable

Please provide any details:

**21** In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? *(tick one box only)*

Yes

No

Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Monitoring the guidance didn't require anything to be changed.

**22** Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2023-24 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

N/A

**23** Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

N/A

**Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)**

**24** Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2023-24, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

Training to include awareness of the provisions of our Equality Scheme and conducting Equality Screenings. The following has been implemented -

- All relevant information/training about the Scheme and equality screenings have been included on the EDI pages on intranet.
- EDI lead has briefed individual teams on both elements.
- An Independent Advisor to the Board provided a report with recommendations to address inequalities, majority of which have been implemented.
- Information on our statutory obligations is provided in induction programme

PART A

- Mandatory EDI training will be considered and included in next year’s report.
- EDI related training and awareness raising plan has been implemented and is being rolled out (see appendix two)

**25** Please provide **any examples** of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

Feedback is routinely monitored after all training sessions to ensure participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge from having attended the session.

**Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)**

**26** Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2023-24, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

Accessibility Guidance has been amended – [Improving the accessibility of elections](#) | Electoral Commission provides details about how and why.

We provided public information support via website, email, telephone and in accessible formats. We conducted accessibility surveys, and improved website functionality- see [accessibility statement from website](#). We provide information in a range of alternative formats on request and work in partnership with a range of organisations to reach more young people, disabled people and ethnically diverse communities.

**Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)**

**27** How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2023-24?

Insert number here:

0
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Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

**Section 3: Looking Forward**

**28** Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

Our NI Equality Scheme was signed off in August 2022 by the Equality Commission. A five-year review will be conducted in 2027.

PART A

- 29** Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)*

We will continue to focus on training and raising awareness of equality screening new/reviewed workplace policies.

- 30** In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)*

- Employment
- Goods, facilities and services
- Legislative changes
- Organisational changes/ new functions
- Nothing specific, more of the same
- Other (please state):



**PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans**

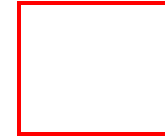
**1. Number of action measures for this reporting period that have been:**



Fully achieved



Partially achieved



Not achieved

We have updated our Disability Action plan and incorporated activities into the revised EDI Action plan.

**2. Please outline below details on all actions that have been fully achieved in the reporting period.**

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs <sup>i</sup>	Outcomes / Impact <sup>ii</sup>
Local <sup>iii</sup>	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Ensuring disability inclusion in our public awareness campaigns and ensuring our campaign materials reflect and represent positive images of disabled people	More disabled people are aware how to register to vote and participate in Elections
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Media interviews with outlets aimed at disabled voters, including RNIB radio and BBC R4's In Touch programme. Interviews covered accessible voting and trials to test	To encourage more blind and partially sighted people to vote

PART B

		new equipment to support blind and partially sighted people to vote	
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Co-created packs with our civil society partners to ensure tailored resources for key voter-facing resources in a range of accessible formats.	Resources provided included easy read, BSL, audio, braille and large print
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Our guidance encouraged Returning Officers to take steps to assist disabled voters at the elections but more needs to be done to raise awareness of what is available.	Following changes in the Elections Act 2022, electoral administrators now have increased flexibility on what support and equipment they can provide at the polling station to enable, or make it easier for, disabled people to vote independently and in secret. Restrictions have also been removed on who can be a 'companion'.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Published <a href="#">guidance</a> for Returning Officers on accessibility responsibilities.	To ensure that polling stations are accessible for disabled people to vote.
	To promote positive attitudes towards disabled people	Undertaking awareness raising events for staff and/or service-users to encourage disabled people to	Barriers to Candidacy Event in Scotland raised important issues in respect of disabled people standing as candidates, such as inaccessible

PART B

		share personal stories or lived experiences with others.	offices, completing complex paperwork and dealing with abuse.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Job advertisements are published in Diversity Jobsite, Overlooked Talent, LGBT Equality, Ethnic Jobsite, Disability Jobsite, Britain Inclusive, Asian jobsite	More people from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities can apply for jobs in the Electoral Commission.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Updated our welcome statement and 'join us' page on website to promote flexible working arrangements to include our commitment to EDI and the Disability Confident Scheme.	More disabled people will apply for jobs in the Electoral Commission.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	We ask applicants to indicate any reasonable adjustments which may be required to assist them during the recruitment process	Applicants are provided with the opportunity to indicate any reasonable adjustments at any stage of the recruitment process.  Candidates are asked to contact the Recruitment team if they require any adjustments which may assist them during the recruitment process. Examples include providing candidates with the questions in advance of the interview.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Progress to WCAG compliant and WACG audit to ensure we are compliant Accessibility partner Zoonou	Our website is accessible and the guidance team produce all documents are WCAG compliant

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	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	To ensure accessibility at all events, meetings and in offices	When organising events, accessibility or special requirements are accommodated where possible. Contact information provided for guests who require specific access arrangements.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	To ensure RO's know how to make polling stations accessible for disabled voters, including provision of hearing loops,	Raise awareness and understanding of our Accessibility Guidance produced for electoral administrators
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Head of Electoral Commission NI was guest speaker at National Disability Authority Annual Conference 2023: Public and political participation of disabled people	Opportunity to share best practice and discuss issues such as, innovative approaches to the future of accessible voting and how to get more disabled people into politics
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	To create opportunities for people with disabilities to campaign and stand for election	Accessible information provided on website, engagement with our partners and hosting events
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Update the postal vote application forms to ensure any new requirements are reflected in clear and user-friendly designs.	Forms will be published in accessible PDF format in line with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	To provide alternative formats for disabled voters on how to register and vote.	Provided BSL video and easy read versions.

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	To mainstream the disability duties in Commission activities	To submit our Annual Progress Report and Disability Action plan to the EDI committee and Equality Commission.	Submitted on time with approval from the Executive Team, demonstrating our commitment to fulfilling our Section 75 obligations.
	To mainstream the disability duties in Commission activities	A revised version of the EDI action plan and Disability action plan was undertaken	To make the plans more action-orientated, outcome-focused and evidence-based.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Adjustments provided for some neurodiverse candidates	They were taken off the mass email list for receiving information which they had reported was overwhelming and were telephoned individually instead.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Ensuring all consultations engage with disabled people and representative groups. Example includes a sticker project has been piloted as a solution to feedback that disabled voters didn't know who to approach for help in polling stations. In a recent report, Mencap have also made six recommendations which are being considered for implementation.	We have successful partnership arrangements with a range of representative groups such as Mencap, RNID, RNIB.

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

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	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Ensure all staff are aware of Disability Duties and the DAP.	Unconscious Bias training	Mandatory training introduced for all Recruitment Panels (23 people trained in period)
2	Ensure all staff are aware of Disability Duties and the DAP.	Menopause awareness training	17th January - relaxed, engaging and positive session looking at menopause, the range of symptoms and where to find support. Another session 23rd January for line managers, where we will be looking at how to have a supportive conversation, where to get help and considering workplace adjustments. Impact – positive feedback received from all participants who reported feeling more informed after the session.
3	Ensure all staff are aware of Disability Duties and the DAP.	Neurodiversity learning hour from Benenden	28 people attended the session
4	Ensure all staff are aware of Disability Duties and the DAP.	L&D suite of disability and wellbeing related topics rolled out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing Personal Stress at Work</li> <li>• Mindfulness in Politics and the Workplace</li> <li>• Encouraging Positive Mental Health at Work</li> <li>• Supporting Sleep in the Workplace</li> <li>• Understanding Mental Toughness and Resilience</li> <li>• Benenden Health Services</li> </ul>
5	Ensure all staff are aware of Disability Duties and the DAP.	Mental Health First Aider Training	Four staff have renewed their training in the period.

PART B

6	Ensure all staff are aware of Disability Duties and the DAP.	Promoting awareness on commitment to Disability Confident Scheme, via staff intranet and dedicated page on Disability duties and our statutory obligations, social model of disability, inclusive language and disability inclusive practices.	All staff will know where to find information more easily and understand our responsibilities.
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2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Identify opportunities to portray positive images of disabled people, in both internal and external communications,	Campaigns – include details of public awareness campaigns using people with visible disabilities and learning disabilities.	Our website and communications continue to be more accessible, particularly to those using screen reading software – for example, PDFs are now either made accessible directly or have been replaced by webpages which work with screen readers
2	Consider how the views of disabled staff are incorporated in the promotion of disability equality in the workplace and in policies, practices, and procedures.	Our updated process for Equality Impact Assessments Staff groups are consulted and involved in decision making	Policy decisions take appropriate account of the needs of disabled people and the barriers they face

PART B

3	Ensure all communications are accessible	Our communications are made accessible and are available in other formats	Disability awareness – resources, guides and information published on ECHO pages under Disability and updated about our Commitment under DCS.
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2 (d) What action measures were achieved to ‘**encourage others**’ to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Build actions and targets relating to the disability duties into work plans and annual operating plans, whilst ensuring that the corporate planning process is informed by adherence to all relevant equality duties	<p>Actions from the Disability Action plan continue to be incorporated into our performance management system Pentana</p> <p>We also drew up a full action tracker that has been incorporated in Pentana</p> <p>Plans have been put in place to include EDI objective in performance management process with all staff</p>	We continue to build on the reporting mechanisms in place to monitor and progress our Disability Action Plan
2	To promote positive attitudes towards disabled people	Active promotion of disability inclusion calendar days to raise awareness amongst staff	Greater awareness of disabilities and understanding the social model of disability
3	To promote positive attitudes towards disabled people	Raise money for Macmillan Cancer - Coffee Morning/Bake Sale 28th September 2023	Raise awareness and demonstrate support for an important cause.



PART B

4	Committed to supporting staff with disabilities	Supporting colleagues with a disability guidance shared	HR have referred 18 people to Occupational Health and Wellbeing, up from 8 the previous year.
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2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
1	Submit annual review of DAP	Review submitted to ECNI	Outcomes as outlined in this report
2	Include questions in Post 2023 Council election research to enable an assessment to be made of the experience of disabled people in participating in the election, or reasons why they did not – identify barriers	Build on baseline data to inform decision making	Findings from this research are currently being reviewed and recommendations drawn up that will be reflected in our post-election report (scheduled for publication in September 2023)
3	Committed to supporting staff with disabilities	Provided staff with accessible equipment to support them at home and in the office to enable them to do their job eg sit/stand desks, adaptable chairs.	IT equipment, such as adapted mouse, laptop risers and modified keyboards have been provided as reasonable adjustments for some staff.

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows:

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones/ Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
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PART B

1	Remove barriers to the selection process	Ensuring and making it clear to disabled applicants, that all documentation is available on request in accessible formats	More applications from disabled people in accessible formats	We are moving to a new HR recruitment system, which is still in development.
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4. Please outline what action measures **have not been achieved** and the reasons why.

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1		

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

Click or tap here to enter text.

(b) Quantitative

After each election we ask members of the public for their views on voting and elections, which helps us understand their experiences. The survey sample is boosted with disabled voters to allow us to better understand their experiences.

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Also after each election we send an accessibility survey to all partners working with disabled people to gather their views on the election and how we can better support them in our partnership work.

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:
- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
  - taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

Please select

No

If yes please outline below:

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1	To scope the feasibility of introducing a Guaranteed Interview Scheme to encourage persons with a disability to apply for roles at the Commission	To increase the number of disabled staff employed within the Commission	12-18 months

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation’s annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

The Disability Action Plan will become a live iterative plan along with the EDI action plan which will be regularly updated, new initiatives and associated projects. The focus of the next plan will be to obtain accurate disability data from current staff and to track disabled candidates during the application and appointment process. Review Mildon Inclusion and Accessibility guide and Inclusive Employers Anti-racism toolkit to determine what activities are required (these will be evidence based and with engagement from EDI Staff groups) .

## PART B

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- i **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.
- ii **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.
- iii **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.