



ARK HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Equality Scheme

Drawn up in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

Ark Housing Association (N.I.) Ltd.
Hawthorn Office Park,
Unit 1, 43 Stockmans Way,
Belfast
BT9 7ET

This document is available in a range of formats on request. Please contact us with your requirements.

Foreword

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) 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 across a range of categories outlined in the Act.

In our Equality Scheme, we set out how Ark Housing Association proposes to fulfill those Section 75 statutory duties.

We will commit the necessary resources in terms of people, time and money to make sure that Section 75 statutory duties are complied with 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 Section 75 statutory duties and for monitoring and reviewing our progress.

We will develop and deliver a programme of communication and training with the aim of ensuring that all our staff and Board Members are made fully aware of our Equality Scheme and understand the commitments and obligations within it. We will develop a programme of awareness raising for our consultees on the Section 75 statutory duties and our commitments in our Equality Scheme.

We, the Chair and Chief Executive of Ark Housing Association, are fully committed to effectively fulfilling our Section 75 statutory duties across all our functions (including service provision, employment, and procurement) through the effective implementation of our Equality Scheme.

We realise the important role that the community and voluntary sector and the general public have to play to ensure the Section 75 statutory duties are effectively implemented. Our Equality Scheme demonstrates how determined we are to ensure there are opportunities, for people affected by our services and policies, to positively influence how we carry out our functions in line with our Section 75 statutory duties. It also offers the means whereby persons directly affected by what they consider to be a failure, on our part, to comply with our Equality Scheme, can make complaints.

On behalf of Ark Housing Association and our staff, 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 Equality Commission guidelines.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Doran'.

Tom Doran
Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim McShane'.

Jim McShane
Chief Executive

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

1.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires Ark Housing Association to comply with two statutory duties:

(i) Section 75

In carrying out our functions relating to Northern Ireland we are required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without;
- persons with dependents and persons without.

(ii) Section 75

In addition, without prejudice to the obligations above, in carrying out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland, we are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

“Functions” include the “powers and duties” of a housing association. This includes our employment and procurement functions. Please see below under “Who We Are and What We Do” for a detailed explanation of our functions.

How We Propose to Fulfil the Section 75 Duties in Relation to the Relevant Functions of Ark Housing Association

1.2 Schedule 9 4. (1) of the Act requires Ark Housing Association as a designated Registered Social Housing Provider to set out in an equality scheme how it proposes to fulfil the duties imposed by Section 75 in relation to its relevant functions. This equality scheme is intended to fulfil that statutory requirement. It is both a statement of our arrangements for fulfilling the Section 75 statutory duties and our plan for their implementation.

1.3 Ark Housing Association is committed to the discharge of its 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.

Who We Are and What We Do

1.4 About Registered Social Housing Providers in Northern Ireland

Registered Social Housing Provider (RSHP) is an independent voluntary organisation dedicated to helping people obtain good, affordable housing which meets their needs. A significant proportion of the work they do assists the government in the delivery of much-needed public services but they are not public bodies.

In April 2004, the RSHPs in Northern Ireland came within the jurisdiction of the Commissioner for Complaints by virtue of Article 146 of The Housing (NI) Order 2003. As a result of this RSHPs were designated as public authorities for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

RSHPs are regulated by the Department for Communities (DfC). They work closely with the DfC and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to deliver housing and related services. Some also provide care and/or support services so they work with the relevant public authorities for the health sector too.

As a result of this situation, RSHPs must adhere to a wide range of policies and procedures which have been developed and are owned by a public authority or government department. In such cases, providers must operate the policy of another body and have little or no scope to change that policy. For example, RSHPs are the main delivery vehicle for the Social Housing Development Programme but need is determined by the NIHE and the DfC develops the programme which is then managed by the Housing Executive. So, whilst RSHPs may bid to deliver part of that programme, they have no powers to shape the programme or establish where new social housing should be built.

In establishing their action plans, RSHPs have therefore been mindful of the need to focus on measures where they have greatest ability to effect change. Where appropriate, potential inequalities identified that fall outside the remit of the housing associations will be referred to the relevant public body.

1.5 About Ark Housing

Ark Housing Association (NI) Ltd is a small to medium sized housing association, registered with the Department for Communities, Industrial and Provident Society for the provision of social housing and associated activities. The Association is also registered as a Charity with the Northern Ireland Charities Commission.

The Association provides, manages and maintains social housing for a broad range of tenants including elderly persons, families, single and lone parents and those with a disability and/or other special needs. The organisation also manages and provides temporary accommodation for homeless families as well as direct provision of homeless support services.

Our Vision

Making a positive difference by empowering people and communities

Our Mission

In partnership, provide quality homes and support services to meet housing need and contribute to the wellbeing of communities

Our Values

Progressive: *Forward thinking, supporting change and transformational;*

Respect: *Treat everyone with dignity and esteem;*

Integrity: *Maintain the highest professional and personal standards;*

Diversity & Equality: *Value diversity and equality in everything we do*

Excellence: *Strive to deliver the highest standards of quality and customer care*

For the purposes of this Equality Scheme, Ark Housing performs the following functions:

- **Housing Management:**
Managing and maintaining a range of supported housing and general needs family accommodation, occasionally in partnership with other specialist agencies;
- **Property Development:**
Managing a capital budget for property development and refurbishment;
- **Staffing:**
Recruitment and employment of staff;

- **Procurement:**
Procurement of goods and services
- **Finance:**
Borrowing/investing money;
- **Sales:**
Sale of dwellings to tenants under certain circumstances;
- **Compliance:**
Adherence to statutory and operating regulations pertaining to a housing association;

Ark Housing is managed and controlled by a board of voluntary members who have responsibility for directing the activity of the Association. Membership comprises of the Chair, Vice-Chair, 10 other members. A General Meeting is held in June every year when new members may seek election and when a third of existing members who wish to continue to serve on the Board are obliged to seek re-election.

Ark Housing is a member of the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) and currently employs between 40-45 people.

Chapter 2 Our Arrangements for Assessing Compliance with Section 75 Duties (Schedule 9 4. (2) (a))

2.1 Some of the arrangements for assessing our compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties are outlined in other relevant parts of this Equality Scheme. Please read Chapter 3 for Consulting; Chapter 4 for our arrangements for assessing, monitoring and publishing impact of policies and Chapter 8 for our Complaints Procedure.

Responsibilities and Reporting

2.2 Ark Housing is committed to the fulfilment of our Section 75 obligations in all parts of our work.

2.3 Responsibility for the effective implementation of our Equality Scheme lies with the Chief Executive. The Director of Finance & Corporate Services is accountable in Ark Housing Association for the development, implementation, maintenance and review of the Equality Scheme in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, including any good practice or guidance that has been or may be issued by the Equality Commission.

2.4 If you have any questions or comments regarding our Equality Scheme, please contact, in the first instance, the Director of Finance & Corporate Services at the address given below and we will respond to you as soon as possible:

Title Director of Finance & Corporate Services

Address Ark Housing Association (N.I.) Ltd.
Hawthorn Office Park,
Unit 1, 43 Stockmans Way,
Belfast
BT9 7ET

Tel No. 028 90 752310

E Mail info@arkhousing.co.uk

2.5 Objectives and targets relating to the statutory duties will be integrated into our strategic and operational business plans. Progress against these objectives are reported quarterly by the Director of Finance & Corporate Services to the Senior Management Team.

2.6 Employees' job descriptions reflect their contributions to the discharge of the Section 75 statutory duties and implementation of the Equality Scheme.

- 2.7 Ark Housing Association prepares an annual report on the progress we have made on implementing the arrangements set out in this Equality Scheme to discharge our Section 75 statutory duties (Section 75 Annual Progress Report).

The Section 75 Annual Progress Report is sent to the Equality Commission by 31 August each year and follows any guidance on annual reporting issued by the Equality Commission. Progress on the delivery of Section 75 statutory duties is also be included in our organisational annual report.

- 2.8 The latest Section 75 Annual Progress Report is available on our website: www.arkhousing.co.uk or by contacting the:

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- 2.9 Ark Housing liaises closely with the Equality Commission to ensure that progress on the implementation of our Equality Scheme is maintained.
- 2.10 We are committed to producing an Action Plan – a demonstration of our due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.
- 2.11 This Action Plan is set out in Appendix 6 of this Equality Scheme
- 2.12 The Action Measures that make up our Action Plan are relevant to our functions. They were developed and prioritised on the basis of an audit of inequalities. The Audit of Inequalities gathered and analysed information across the Section 75 categories to identify the inequalities that exist for our service users and those affected by our policies.
- 2.13 The Association, in developing its Equality Scheme and Action Plan has considered the findings of the ECNI Report titled 'Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities; April 2017. Action measures are specific, measurable, linked to achievable outcomes, realistic and time bound. Action measures include performance indicators and timescales for their achievement.

- 2.14 We have developed an action plan for 5 years to coincide with the period of our Corporate Strategy in order to align it with our corporate and business planning cycles. Implementation of the action measures is also incorporated into our business planning process.
- 2.15 We will seek input from our stakeholders and consult on our action plan before we send it to the Equality Commission and thereafter when reviewing the plan as per 2.16 below.
- 2.16 We will monitor our progress on the delivery of our action measures annually and update the action plan as necessary to ensure that it remains effective and relevant to our functions and work.
- 2.17 Ark Housing Association will inform the Commission of any changes or amendments to its action plan 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 plan/action measures.
- 2.18 Once finalised, our action plan will be available on the Association's website: www.arkhousing.co.uk or by contacting:

Title Director of Finance & Corporate Services
Address Ark Housing Association (N.I.) Ltd.
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If you require it in an alternative format, please contact us at the address above.

The Association will keep apprised of any legislation which is likely to have an impact upon our statutory requirements and, if necessary, adjust the Action Plan accordingly.

Furthermore, the Association shall liaise with the Equality Commission to ensure it is compliant with statutory duties prior to any change.

Chapter 3 **Our Arrangements for Consulting**

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (a)) - on matters to which a duty (S75 (1) or (2)) is likely to be relevant (including details of the persons to be consulted).

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (b)) on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by us on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

- 3.1 We recognise the importance of consultation in all aspects of the implementation of our statutory equality duties. We will consult on our Equality Scheme, Action Measures, Equality Impact Assessments and other matters relevant to the Section 75 statutory duties.
- 3.2 We are committed to carrying out consultation in accordance with the following principles (as contained in the Equality Commission's guidance '*Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010)*'):
- 3.2.1 All consultations will seek the views of those directly affected by the matter/policy, the Equality Commission, representative groups of Section 75 categories, other public authorities, voluntary and community groups, our staff and their trades unions and such other groups who have a legitimate interest in the matter, whether or not they have a direct economic or personal interest.

To ensure the most effective use of our and our consultees' resources, we will take a targeted approach to consultation for those consultees that may have a particular interest in the matter/policy being consulted upon and to whom the matter/policy is of particular relevance. This may include for example regional or local consultations, sectoral or thematic consultation etc.

Throughout each formal consultation exercise, the relevant documents will also be available, in a range of formats including hard copies, directly from Ark Housing Association.

- 3.2.2 Consultation with all stakeholders will begin as early as possible. We will engage with affected individuals and representative groups to identify how best to consult or engage with them. We will ask our consultees what their preferred consultation methods are and will give consideration to these.

Methods of consultation could include:

- Face-to-face meetings;
- Focus groups;
- Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing;
- Questionnaires/Surveys;
- Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/opt out of the consultation;
- Internet discussions;
- Telephone consultations.

This list is not exhaustive and we may develop other additional methods of consultation more appropriate to key stakeholders and the matter being consulted upon.

- 3.2.3 We will consider the accessibility and format of every method of consultation we use in order to remove barriers to the consultation process. Specific consideration will be given as to how best to communicate with children and young people, people with disabilities (in particular people with learning disabilities) and minority ethnic communities. We take account of existing and developing good practice, including the Equality Commission's guidance *Let's Talk Let's Listen – Guidance for public authorities on consulting and involving children and young people (2008)*.

Ark Housing recognises that members of some of the Section 75 categories may not wish to be publicly identified as belonging to a particular group and we will take this into account when determining the best methods of consultation.

RSHPs provide services to a wide range of people. However, based on the Association's tenant profile, specific consideration is given to:

- Single people
- Families
- Persons for whom their first language is not English
- Older People; and
- People with Disabilities

Information will be made available, on request, in alternative formats, in a timely manner, usually within 15 working days dependent upon the nature of the request. We will ensure that such consultees have equal time to respond.

3.2.4 Specific training is provided to those facilitating consultations to ensure that they have the necessary skills to communicate effectively with consultees.

3.2.5 To ensure effective consultation with consultees on Section 75 matters, we will develop a programme of awareness-raising on the Section 75 statutory duties and the commitments in our equality scheme by undertaking the following:

- Meetings with the Board of Management
- Meetings with tenants
- Meetings with staff
- Meetings with Joint Management Partners
- Public Consultation Exercises
- Availability of information on websites and newsletters, if applicable

3.2.6 The consultation period lasts for a minimum of twelve weeks to allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves as part of the process of forming a view. However, in exceptional circumstances when this timescale is not feasible (for example implementing EU Directives or UK wide legislation, meeting Health and Safety requirements, addressing urgent public health matters or complying with Court judgments), we may shorten timescales to eight weeks or less before the policy is implemented. We may continue consultation thereafter and will review the policy as part of our monitoring commitments.

Where, under these exceptional circumstances, we must implement a policy immediately, as it is beyond our authority's control, we may consult after implementation of the policy, in order to ensure that any impacts of the policy are considered.

3.2.7 If a consultation exercise is to take place over a period when consultees are less able to respond, for example, over the summer or Christmas break, or if the policy under consideration is particularly complex, we will give consideration to the feasibility of allowing a longer period for the consultation.

3.2.8 Ark Housing is conscious of the fact that affected individuals and representative groups may have different needs. We will take appropriate measures to ensure full participation in any meetings that are held. We will consider, for example, the time of day, the appropriateness of the venue, in particular whether it can be accessed by those with disabilities, how the meeting is to be conducted, the use

of appropriate language, whether a signer and/or interpreter is necessary, and whether the provision of childcare and support for other carers is required.

3.2.9 Ark Housing makes all relevant information available to consultees in appropriate formats to ensure meaningful consultation. This includes detailed information on the policy proposal being consulted upon and any relevant quantitative and qualitative data.

3.2.10 In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we take into account any assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy.

3.2.11 We provide feedback to consultees in a timely manner. A feedback report is prepared which includes summary information on the policy consulted upon, a summary of consultees' comments and a summary of our consideration of and response to consultees' input. The feedback is provided in formats suitable to consultees.

3.3 A list of our consultees is included in this Equality Scheme at Appendix 3. It can also be obtained from our website at www.arkhousing.co.uk or by contacting:

Title Director of Finance & Corporate Services

Address Ark Housing Association (N.I.) Ltd.
Hawthorn Office Park,
Unit 1, 43 Stockmans Way,
Belfast
BT9 7ET

E Mail info@arkhousing.co.uk

3.4 Our consultation list is not exhaustive and is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it remains relevant to our functions and policies.

We welcome enquiries from any person/s or organisations wishing to be added to the list of consultees. Please contact the Director of Finance & Corporate Services, Ark Housing to provide your contact details and have your areas of interest noted or have your name/details removed or amended. Please also inform us at this stage if you would like information sent to you in a particular format or language.

3.5 In consulting, we will take cognisance of ODI guidance on accessible consultation events for people with a disability:
www.officefordisability.gov.uk/iod/channels/events.php

Chapter 4 **Our Arrangements for Assessing, Monitoring and Publishing the Impact of Policies**

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (b); Schedule 9 4. (2) (c); Schedule 9 4. (2) (d); Schedule 9 9. (1); Schedule 9 9.(2))

Our Arrangements for Assessing the Likely Impact of Policies Adopted or Proposed to be Adopted on the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity (Schedule 9 4. (2) (b))

- 4.1 In the context of Section 75, 'policy' is very broadly defined and it covers all the ways in which we carry out or propose to carry out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland. In respect of this Equality Scheme, the term 'policy' is used for any (proposed / amended / existing) strategy, policy initiative or practice and/or decision, whether written or unwritten and irrespective of the label given to it, ego, 'draft', 'pilot', 'high level' or 'sectoral'.
- 4.2 In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we take into account any assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy, as required by Schedule 9 9. (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- 4.3 Ark Housing uses the tools of **screening** and **equality impact assessment** to assess 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 also follow Equality Commission guidance:
- the guidance on screening, including the screening template, as detailed in the Commission's guidance '*Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010)*' and
 - on undertaking an equality impact assessment as detailed in the Commission's guidance '*Practical guidance on equality impact assessment (February 2005)*'.

Screening

- 4.4 The purpose of screening is to identify those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations.
- 4.5 Screening is completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development/review process. Policies which we propose to adopt will be subject to screening prior to implementation. For more detailed strategies or policies that are to be put in place through a series of stages, we will screen at various stages during implementation, as appropriate.

- 4.6 The lead role in the screening of a policy is taken by the policy decision maker who has the authority to make changes to that policy. However, screening will also involve other relevant team members, for example, equality specialists, those who implement the policy and staff members from other relevant work areas. Where possible, we will include key stakeholders in the screening process.
- 4.7 The following questions are applied to all our policies as part of the screening process:
- What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? (minor/major/none)
 - Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equality categories?
 - To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? (minor/major/none)
 - Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?
- 4.8 In order to answer the screening questions, we gather all relevant information and data, both qualitative and quantitative. In taking this evidence into account we consider the different needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 equality categories. Any screening decision will be informed by this evidence.
- 4.9 Completion of screening, taking into account our consideration of the answers to all four screening questions set out in 4.7 above, will lead to one of the following three outcomes:
- 1) the policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment
 - 2) the policy has been 'screened out' with mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted
 - 3) the policy has been 'screened out' without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.
- 4.10 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'minor' in respect of one, or more, of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we may on occasion decide to proceed with an equality impact assessment, depending on the policy. If an EQIA is not to be conducted we will nonetheless consider measures that might mitigate the policy impact as

well as alternative policies that might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Where we mitigate, we will outline in our screening template the reasons to support this decision together with the proposed changes, amendments or alternative policy.

This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead within Ark Housing.

- 4.11 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'major' in respect of one, or more, of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we will normally subject the policy to an equality impact assessment.

This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead Ark Housing Association.

- 4.12 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'none', in respect of all of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, we will give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead within Ark Housing Association.

- 4.13 As soon as possible, following the completion of the screening process, a summary of the screening template, signed off and approved by the senior manager responsible for the policy will be made available on our website www.arkhousing.co.uk and on request from:

Title	Director of Finance & Corporate Services
Address	Ark Housing Association (N.I.) Ltd. Hawthorn Office Park, Unit 1, 43 Stockmans Way, Belfast BT9 7ET
Tel No.	028 90 752310
E Mail	info@arkhousing.co.uk

- 4.14 If a consultee, including the Equality Commission, raises a concern about a screening decision based on supporting evidence, we will review the screening decision.

4.15 Our screening reports are published quarterly.

Equality Impact Assessment

4.16 An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy, whether that policy is formal or informal, and irrespective of the scope of that policy. The primary function of an EQIA is to determine the extent of any impact of a policy upon 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 more effectively promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

4.17 Once a policy is screened and screening has identified that an equality impact assessment is necessary, we will carry out the EQIA in accordance with Equality Commission guidance. The equality impact assessment will be carried out as part of the policy development process, before the policy is implemented.

4.18 Any equality impact assessment will be subject to consultation at the appropriate stage(s). (For details see above Chapter 3 “Our Arrangements for Consulting”).

Our Arrangements for Publishing the Results of the Assessments of the Likely Impact of Policies We Have Adopted or Propose to Adopt on the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity (Schedule 9 4. (2) (d); Schedule 9 9. (1))

4.19 We make publicly available the results of our assessments (screening and EQIA) of the likely impact of our policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations.

What We Publish

4.20 Screening Reports

Screening Reports, which are published quarterly, detail:

- All policies screened by Ark Housing 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.

4.21 For details on the availability of our screening templates, please refer to 4:13

4.22 Equality Impact Assessments

EQIA reports are published once the impact assessment has been completed. These reports 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

4.23 All information we publish is accessible and can be made available in alternative formats on request.

Where We Publish the Information

4.24 The results of our assessments (screening reports and completed templates, the results of equality impact assessments) are available on our website www.arkhousing.co.uk or by contacting:

Title	Director of Finance & Corporate Services
Address	Ark Housing Association (N.I.) Ltd. Hawthorn Office Park, Unit 1, 43 Stockmans Way, Belfast BT9 7ET
Tel No	028 90 752310

E Mail info@arkhousing.co.uk

- 4.25 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 available to all consultees on a quarterly basis.
- 4.26 We will inform the general public about the availability of this material through communications such as press releases, where appropriate.

Our Arrangements for Monitoring any Adverse Impact of Policies we have Adopted on Equality of Opportunity

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (c))

- 4.27 Monitoring can assist us to deliver better public services and continuous improvements. Monitoring Section 75 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). In order to carry out monitoring in a confidential and effective manner, Ark Housing Association follows guidance from the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Equality Commission.
- 4.28 Ark Housing monitors 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 Equality Commission guidance.
- 4.29 The systems we have established to monitor the impact of policies and identify opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations are:
- The collection, collation and analysis of existing relevant primary quantitative and qualitative data across all nine equality categories on an ongoing basis
 - The collection, collation and analysis of existing relevant secondary sources of quantitative and qualitative data across all nine equality categories on an ongoing basis
 - An audit of existing information systems 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
 - Undertaking or commissioning new data if necessary.

- 4.30 If, over a two-year period, monitoring and evaluation show that a policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, we will ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for relevant equality groups.
- 4.31 We review our EQIA monitoring information on an annual basis. Other monitoring information is reviewed on an ongoing basis or when an issue is brought to the Association's attention.

Our Arrangements for Publishing the Results of our Monitoring

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (d))

- 4.32 Schedule 9 4. (2) (d) requires us to publish the results of the monitoring of adverse impacts of policies we have adopted. However, we are committed to monitoring more broadly and the results of our policy monitoring are published as follows:
- 4.33 EQIA monitoring information is published as part of our Section 75 Annual Progress Report;
- 4.34 All information published is accessible and can be made available in alternative formats on request.

Chapter 5 Staff Training (Schedule 9 4.2 (e))

Commitment to Staff Training

- 5.1 We recognise that awareness raising and training play a crucial role in the effective implementation of our Section 75 duties.
- 5.2 The Chief Executive will positively communicate the commitment of Ark Housing to the Section 75 statutory duties, both internally and externally. To this end we will continue to run an effective communication and training programme for all staff and ensure that our commitment to the Section 75 statutory duties is made clear in all relevant publications.

Training Objectives

- 5.3 Ark Housing will draw up a detailed training plan for its staff which will achieve the following objectives:
- to raise awareness of the provisions of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, 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;
 - to provide those staff involved in the assessment of policies (screening and EQIA) with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively;
 - to provide those staff who deal with complaints in relation to compliance with our equality scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to investigate and monitor complaints effectively;
 - to provide those staff involved in consultation processes with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively;
 - to provide those staff involved in the implementation and monitoring of the effective implementation of Ark Housing's equality scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively.

Awareness Raising and Training Arrangements

- 5.4 The following arrangements are in place to ensure all our staff and Board Members are aware of and understand the organisation's Section 75 obligations.

- We will develop a summary of this equality scheme and make it available to all staff;
- We will provide access to copies of the full equality scheme for all staff; ensure that any queries or questions of clarification from staff are addressed effectively;
- Staff in Ark Housing will receive a briefing on this equality scheme within as soon as possible after approval of scheme;
- The Section 75 statutory duties will form part of induction training for new staff;
- Focused training is provided for key staff within Ark Housing who are directly engaged in taking forward the implementation of our equality scheme commitments (for example those involved in research and data collection, policy development, service design, conducting equality impact assessments, consultation, monitoring and evaluation);
- Where appropriate, training will be provided to ensure staff are aware of the issues experienced by the range of Section 75 groups;
- When appropriate and on an ongoing basis, arrangements will be made to ensure staff are kept up to date with Section 75 developments;
- As we are working jointly with other designated RSHPs through NIFHA, Ark Housing will contribute to and participate in all equality training events which arise as a result of Section 75 duties;
- A learning and development plan and calendar is produced outlining all the learning and development, including the equality related training.

5.5 Training and awareness raising programmes will, where relevant, be developed in association with the appropriate Section 75 groups and our staff.

Monitoring and Evaluation

5.6 Ark Housing's training programme is subject to the following monitoring and evaluation arrangements:

- We evaluate the extent to which all participants in this training programme have acquired the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve each of the above objectives;
- The extent to which training objectives have been met will be reported on as part of the Section 75 annual progress report, which will be sent to the Equality Commission;
- We will monitor and evaluate the number of staff trained and the equality profile of the staff trained, as well as the job roles of the staff involved in equality training

Chapter 6 Our Arrangements for Ensuring and Assessing Public Access to Information and Services We Provide (Schedule 9 4. (2) (f))

- 6.1 Ark Housing is committed to ensuring that the information we disseminate and the services we provide are fully accessible to all parts of the community in Northern Ireland. We keep our arrangements under review to ensure that this remains the case.
- 6.2 The Association is aware that some groups will not have the same access to information as others. In particular:
- People with sensory, learning, communication and mobility disabilities may require printed information in other formats;
 - Members of ethnic minority groups, whose first language is not English, may have difficulties with information provided only in English.
 - Children and young people may not be able to fully access or understand information.

Access to Information

- 6.3 To ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information, we provide information in alternative formats on request, where reasonably practicable. Where the exact request cannot be met, we will ensure a reasonable alternative is provided.
- Alternative formats may include Easy Read, Braille, CD, MP3, large print or minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language.
 - The Association will liaise with representatives of young people and disability and minority ethnic organisations and take account of existing and developing good practice.
 - We will respond to requests for information in alternative formats in a timely manner, usually within 20 working days of receiving a request.

- 6.4 In disseminating information through the media, Ark Housing will seek to advertise in the press, where appropriate

Access to Services

- 6.5 Ark Housing is committed to ensuring that all of our services are fully accessible to everyone in the community across the Section 75 categories.

The Association also adheres to the relevant provisions of current anti-discrimination legislation.

- 6.6 In disseminating information through the media, Ark Housing, in association with NIFHA, will seek to advertise in the press. This arrangement will be kept under review in terms of promoting wide access throughout the implementation of statutory equality duties. The Association intends that all its services are fully accessible to all parts of the community in Northern Ireland.

Assessing Public Access to Information and Services

- 6.7 We monitor, on an annual basis, across all our functions, in relation to access to information and services, to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.
- 6.8 Monitoring is achieved through measurement of KPIs against business plans and monitoring of information via our own in house Management and Information Systems and globally through NIFHA's coordinated NICORE submissions. This allows the Association to gauge the throughput of users whilst capturing S75 type data.
- 6.8. The Tenant Satisfaction Survey, in which we aim to include 10% of all our tenants, asks general questions about satisfaction with accessing services through various means. The survey also examines satisfaction with the opportunities for involvement in the work of Ark Housing.

We routinely review our approach to surveys and collating customer satisfaction feedback to ensure that every customer has the same opportunity to engage at a level that is appropriate for them.

Chapter 7 Timetable For Measures We Propose In This Equality Scheme (Schedule 9 4. (3) (b))

- 7.1 Appendix 4 outlines our timetable for delivering all measures proposed within this equality scheme. The measures outlined in this timetable will be incorporated into our business planning processes.
- 7.2 This timetable is different from and in addition to our commitment to developing action plans/action measures to specifically address inequalities and further promote equality of opportunity and good relations. We have included in our equality scheme a commitment to develop an action plan. Accordingly, this commitment is listed in the timetable of measures at Appendix 4.

Chapter 8 **Our Complaints Procedure** (Schedule 9 10.)

8.1 Ark Housing Association is responsive to the views of members of the public. We will endeavour to resolve all complaints made to us.

8.2 Schedule 9 paragraph 10 of the Act refers to complaints. A person can make a complaint to a RSHP if the complainant believes he or she may have been directly affected by an alleged failure of the authority to comply with its approved equality scheme.

If the complaint has not been resolved within a reasonable timescale, the complaint can be brought to the Equality Commission.

Stage 1

8.3 In the first instance, a person wishing to make a complaint that Ark Housing Association has failed to comply with its approved Equality Scheme should contact:

Title Director of Finance & Corporate Services

Address Ark Housing Association (N.I.) Ltd.
Hawthorn Office Park,
Unit 1, 43 Stockmans Way,
Belfast
BT9 7ET

Tel No. 028 90 752310

E Mail. info@arkhousing.co.uk

8.4 In accordance with our general complaints procedure, we will acknowledge receipt of each complaint within 5 working days and record the complaint on our Complaints Register.

8.5 Ark Housing will carry out an internal investigation of the complaint and will respond substantively to the complainant within 20 working days of the date of receiving the letter of complaint. The decision in respect of the complaint will be given in writing normally within three working days of that decision. Under certain circumstances, if the complexity of the matter requires a longer period, the period for response to the complainant may be extended. The complainant will be advised of the extended period.

8.6 During this process the complainant will be kept fully informed of the progress of the investigation into the complaint and of any outcomes.

Stage 2

8.7 If the complainant is unhappy with the decision provided, they are entitled to submit a further complaint for the attention of:

Title Chief Executive
Ark Housing Association
Address Hawthorn Office Park,
Unit 1, 43 Stockmans Way,
Belfast
BT9 7ET
Tel No. 028 90 752310
E Mail. info@arkhousing.co.uk

8.8 On receipt of a further complaint, the following process will apply:

- An acknowledgement letter will be issued within 3 working days;
- The circumstances of the case and grounds for complaint will be reviewed by the Chair;
- The Chair will make a decision on the complaint, normally within 20 working days;
- A written notification of the decision will be issued, normally within 3 working days of the decision being made;

Stage 3

If the complainant is still unhappy with the decision, they will be advised of their right to make a further complaint to the Equality Commission at the following address:

Equality Commission
Complaints Co-ordinator
Equality House
7-9 Shaftesbury Square,
Belfast
BT2 7DM

Tel No: 028 90 500600
Email: information@equalityni.org

8.9 In any subsequent investigation by the Equality Commission, Ark Housing will co-operate fully, providing access in a timely manner to any relevant documentation that the Equality Commission may require.

Similarly, Ark Housing will co-operate fully with any investigation by the Equality Commission under sub-paragraph 11 (1) (b) of Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

- 8.10 Ark Housing Association will make all efforts to implement promptly and in full any recommendations arising out of any Commission investigation.

Chapter 9 Publication of Our Equality Scheme

(Schedule 9 4. (3) (c))

9.1 Ark Housing's Equality Scheme is available, free of charge, in print form and alternative formats from:

Title Director of Finance & Corporate Services
Ark Housing Association

Address Hawthorn Office Park
37A Stockmans Way
Belfast
BT9 7ET

Tel No. 028 90 752310

E Mail. info@arkhousing.co.uk

9.2 Our Equality Scheme is also available to view or download from our website at: www.arkhousing.co.uk

9.3 The following arrangements are in place for the publication in a timely manner of our Equality Scheme to ensure equality of access:

- We will make every effort to communicate widely the existence and content of our Equality Scheme. This may include press releases, prominent advertisements in the press, the internet and direct mail shots to groups representing the various categories in Section 75.
- We will email a link to our approved Equality Scheme to our consultees on our consultation lists. Other consultees without e-mail will be notified by letter that the Scheme is available on request. We will respond to requests for the Equality Scheme in alternative formats in a timely manner, usually within two weeks of a request being made.
- Our Equality Scheme is available on request in alternative formats such as Easy Read, Braille, large print, CD, MP3, and in minority languages to meet the needs of those not fluent in English.

9.4 For a list of our stakeholders and consultees please see Appendix 3 of the Equality Scheme, or visit our website at www.arkhousing.co.uk or contact our Director of Finance & Corporate Service (contact details at Section 9.1)

Chapter 10 Review of Our Equality Scheme

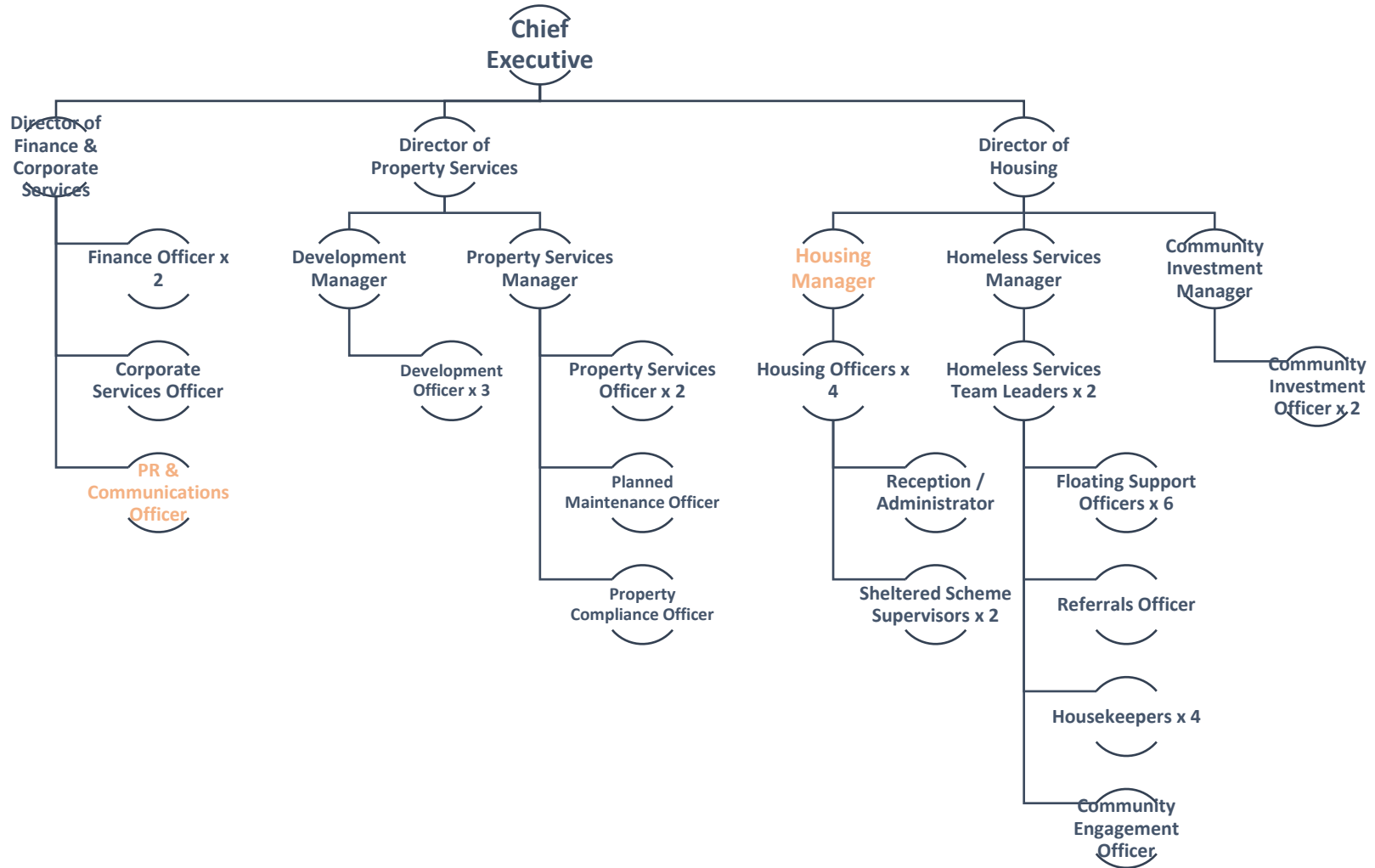
(Schedule 9 8. (3))

- 10.1 As required by Schedule 9 paragraph 8 (3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we will conduct a thorough review of this Equality Scheme. This review will take place either within five years of submission of this equality scheme to the Equality Commission or within a shorter timescale to allow alignment with the review of other planning cycles.

The review will evaluate the effectiveness of our Scheme in relation to the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties relevant to our functions in Northern Ireland.

- 10.2 In undertaking this review we will follow any guidance issued by the Equality Commission. A report of this review will be made public through our website and a copy sent to the Equality Commission.

APPENDIX 1 Organisational Chart



APPENDIX 2 Example Groups Relevant to the Section 75 Categories for Northern Ireland Purposes

Please note, this list is for illustration purposes only, it is not exhaustive.

Category	Example groups
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 <i>Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order</i> ¹ . Therefore, “religious belief” also includes any <i>perceived</i> religious belief (or perceived lack of belief) and, in employment situations only, it also covers any “ <i>similar philosophical belief</i> ”.
Political Opinion ²	Nationalist generally; Unionists generally; members/supporters of other political parties.
Racial Group	Black people; Chinese; Indians; Pakistanis; people of mixed ethnic background; Polish; Roma; Travellers; White people.
Men and Women generally	Men (including boys); Trans-gendered people; Transsexual people; women (including girls).
Marital Status	Civil partners or 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; or the care of a dependant older person.
Sexual Orientation	Bisexual people; heterosexual people; gay or lesbian people.

¹ See Section 98 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which states: “*In this Act...“political opinion” and “religious belief” shall be construed in accordance with Article 2(3) and (4) of the Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998.*”

APPENDIX 3 List of Possible Consultees
(as and when required) (Schedule 9 4. (2) (a))

Public Bodies
Community Relations Council
Department for Communities (DfC)
Equality Commission NI
Information Commissioner's Office
Supporting Communities NI
Housing Organisations
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA)
Housing Rights Services
Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)
Chartered Institute of Housing (CiH)
Homeless Connect
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Simon Community
Others – Voluntary, Charity, Community, Trade Unions
RNID – Royal National Institute for Deaf People
Age NI
An Munia Tober
Disability Action, Northern Ireland
Gingerbread Northern Ireland
NIGRA (Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association)
Northern Ireland Committee for Refugees & Asylum Seekers (NICRAS)
Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU)
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
Rural Community Network
The Cedar Foundation
The Rainbow Project
Threshold Services

APPENDIX 4 Timetable for Delivering Equality Scheme Measures

(Schedule 9 4.(3) (b))

Measure	Lead Responsibility	Timetable
Submit Section 75 Annual Progress Report (2.7)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services / Chief Executive	31 August (annually)
Consultation on draft scheme and action plan (Chapter 3)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	In line with consultation on Equality Scheme
Finalised Scheme and Action Plan published (2.17)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services / Chief Executive	Five Yearly
Implement & deliver Action Plan (2.17)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services / Chief Executive	Report Quarterly
Arrangements for monitoring progress in place (4.27)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	Ongoing
Consultation list reviewed and updated (3.3)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	Annually
Screening Timetable (4.4)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	Annually
Screening Reports (4.15)	Senior Management Team	Quarterly
EQIA Timetable (4.16)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	As required
Development of Summary Document of Equality Scheme (5.4)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	Within 6 months of ECNI approval of Scheme
Development of Equality Training Programme (5.5)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	Annually
Evaluation of Equality Training (5.6)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	Annually
Assessing access to information and services (6.9)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	Annually
Communication of Equality Scheme (9.3)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	Ongoing
Notification of Consultees (9.3)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	Ongoing
Review of Equality Scheme (10.1)	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	Within Five Years of Submission
Publication of Monitoring Information	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	Ongoing

Appendix 5 Glossary of Terms

Action Plan

A plan which sets out actions a public authority will take to implement its Section 75 statutory duties. It is a mechanism for the realisation of measures to achieve equality outcomes for the Section 75 equality and good relations categories.

Action Measures and Outcomes

Specific measures to promote equality and good relations for the relevant Section 75 and good relations categories, linked to achievable outcomes, which should be realistic and timely.

Adverse Impact

Where a Section 75 category has been affected differently by a policy and the effect is less favourable, it is known as adverse impact. If a policy has an adverse impact on a Section 75 category, a public authority must consider whether or not the adverse impact is unlawfully discriminatory. In either case a public authority must take measures to redress the adverse impact, by considering mitigating measures and/or alternative ways of delivering the policy.

Affirmative Action

In general terms, affirmative action can be defined as being anything consistent with the legislation which is necessary to bring about positive change. It is a phrase used in the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (NI) 1998 to describe lawful action that is aimed at promoting equality of opportunity and fair participation in employment between members of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities in Northern Ireland.

Article 55 Review

Under the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, all registered employers must conduct periodic reviews of the composition of their workforces and of their employment practices for the purposes of determining whether members of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities are enjoying, and are likely to continue to enjoy, fair participation in employment in each employer's concern.

These reviews, which are commonly known as Article 55 Reviews, must be conducted at least once every three years.

Audit of Inequalities

An audit of inequalities is a systematic review and analysis of inequalities which exist for service users and those affected by a public authority's policies. An audit can be used by a public authority to inform its work in relation to the Section 75 equality and good relations duties.

It can also enable public authorities to assess progress on the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties, as it provides baseline information on existing inequalities relevant to a public authority's functions.

Consultation

In the context of Section 75, consultation is the process of asking those affected by a policy (ie, service users, staff, the general public) for their views on how the policy could be implemented more effectively to promote equality of opportunity across the 9 categories. Different circumstances will call for different types of consultation. Consultations could, for example, include meetings, focus groups, surveys and questionnaires.

Differential Impact

Differential impact occurs where a Section 75 group has been affected differently by a policy. This effect could either be positive, neutral or negative. A public authority must make a judgement as to whether a policy has a differential impact and then it must determine whether the impact is adverse, based on a systematic appraisal of the accumulated information.

Discrimination

The anti-discrimination laws prohibit the following forms of discrimination:

Direct Discrimination - this generally occurs where a public authority treats a person less favourably than it treats (or, would treat) another person, in the same or similar circumstances, on one or more of the statutory non-discrimination grounds. A decision or action that is directly discriminatory will normally be unlawful unless: (a) in an age discrimination case, the decision can be objectively justified, or (b) in any other case, the public authority can rely on a statutory exception that permits it – such as a *genuine occupational requirement exception*; or, a *positive action exception* which permits an employer to use “welcoming statements” or to take other lawful positive action to encourage participation by under-represented or otherwise disadvantaged groups.

Indirect Discrimination - The definition of this term varies across some of the anti-discrimination laws, but indirect discrimination generally occurs where a public authority applies to all persons a particular provision, criterion or practice, but which is one that has the effect of placing people who share a particular equality characteristic (e.g. the same sex, or religious belief, or race) at a particular disadvantage compared to other people. A provision, criterion or practice that is indirectly discriminatory will normally be unlawful unless (a) it can be objectively justified, or (b) the public authority can rely on a statutory exception that permits it.

Disability Discrimination - In addition to direct discrimination and victimisation and harassment, discrimination against disabled people may also occur in two other ways: namely:

(1) Disability-related Discrimination :generally occurs where a public authority, without lawful justification, and for a reason which relates to a disabled person's disability, treats that person less favourably than it treats (or, would treat) other people to whom that reason does not (or, would not) apply.

(2) Failure To Comply With A Duty To Make Reasonable Adjustments:

One of the most notable features of the disability discrimination legislation is that in prescribed circumstances it imposes a duty on employers, service providers and public authorities to take such steps as are reasonable to remove or reduce particular disadvantages experienced by disabled people in those circumstances.

Victimisation

This form of discrimination generally occurs where a public authority treats a person less favourably than it treats (or, would treat) another person, in the same or similar circumstances, because the person has previously exercised his/her rights under the anti-discrimination laws, or has assisted another person to do so. Victimisation cannot be justified and is always unlawful.

Harassment

Harassment generally occurs where a person is subjected to unwanted conduct that is related to a non-discrimination ground with the purpose, or which has the effect, of violating their dignity or of creating for them an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Harassment cannot be justified and is always unlawful.

Equality Impact Assessment

The mechanism underpinning Section 75, where existing and proposed policies are assessed in order to determine whether they have an adverse impact on equality of opportunity for the relevant Section 75 categories. Equality impact assessments require the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Equality of Opportunity

The prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between people on grounds of characteristics including sex, marital status, age, disability, religious belief, political opinion, dependants, race and sexual orientation. The promotion of equality of opportunity entails more than the elimination of discrimination. It requires proactive measures to be taken to secure equality of opportunity between the categories identified under Section 75.

Equality Scheme

A document which outlines a public authority's arrangements for complying with its Section 75 obligations. An equality scheme must include an outline of the public authority's arrangements for carrying out consultations, screening, equality impact assessments, monitoring, training and arrangements for ensuring access to information and services.

Good Relations

Although not defined in the legislation, the Commission has agreed the following working definition of good relations: 'the growth of relations and structures for Northern Ireland that acknowledge the religious, political and racial context of this society, and that seek to promote respect, equity and trust, and embrace diversity in all its forms'.

Mainstreaming Equality

The integration of equal opportunities principles, strategies and practices into the everyday work of public authorities from the outset. In other words, mainstreaming is the process of ensuring that equality considerations are built into the policy development process from the beginning, rather than being bolted on at the end. Mainstreaming can help improve methods of working by increasing a public authority's accountability, responsiveness to need and relations with the public. It can bring added value at many levels.

Mitigation of Adverse Impact

Where an equality impact assessment reveals that a particular policy has an adverse impact on equality of opportunity, a public authority must consider ways of delivering the policy outcomes which have a less adverse effect on the relevant Section 75 categories; this is known as mitigating adverse impact.

Monitoring

Monitoring consists of continuously scrutinising and evaluating a policy to assess its impact on the Section 75 categories. Monitoring must be sensitive to the issues associated with human rights and privacy. Public authorities should seek advice from consultees and Section 75 representative groups when setting up monitoring systems.

Monitoring consists of the collection of relevant information and evaluation of policies. It is not solely about the collection of data, it can also take the form of regular meetings and reporting of research undertaken. Monitoring is not an end in itself but provides the data for the next cycle of policy screening.

Northern Ireland Act

The Northern Ireland Act, implementing the Good Friday Agreement, received Royal Assent on 19 November 1998. Section 75 of the Act created the statutory equality duties.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

A statutory body established under Section 68 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which works to ensure that the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland are fully protected in law, policy and practice.

Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA)

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is an Executive Agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). They provide statistical and research information regarding Northern Ireland issues and provide registration services to the public in the most effective and efficient way.

OFMdFM

The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister is responsible for providing advice, guidance, challenge and support to other NI Civil Service Departments on Section 75 issues.

PAFT

The Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment (PAFT) Guidelines constituted the first non-statutory attempt at mainstreaming equality in Northern Ireland in January 1994. The aim of the PAFT Guidelines was to ensure that issues of equality and equity informed policy making and activity in all spheres and at all levels of government. PAFT has now been superseded by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Policy

The formal and informal decisions a public authority makes in relation to carrying out its duties. Defined in the New Oxford English Dictionary as 'a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government party, business or individual'. In the context of Section 75, the term **policies** covers all the ways in which a public authority carries out or proposes to carry out its functions relating to Northern Ireland. Policies include unwritten as well as written policies.

Positive Action

This phrase is not defined in any statute, but the Equality Commission understands it to mean any lawful action that a public authority might take for the purpose of promoting equality of opportunity for all persons in relation to employment or in accessing goods, facilities or services (such as health services, housing, education, justice, policing). It may involve adopting new policies, practices, or procedures; or changing or abandoning old ones. *Positive action* is not the same as *positive discrimination*.

Positive discrimination differs from positive action in that *positive action* involves the taking of lawful actions whereas *positive discrimination* involves the taking of unlawful actions. Consequently, *positive action* is by definition lawful whereas *positive discrimination* is unlawful.

SACHR

The Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR) has now been replaced by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. SACHR, as part of its review of mechanisms in place to promote employment equality and reduce the unemployment differential, recommended that the PAFT Guidelines should be made a statutory requirement.

Screening

The procedure for identifying which policies will be subject to equality impact assessment, and how these equality impact assessments will be prioritised. The purpose of screening is to identify the policies which are likely to have a minor/major impact on equality of opportunity so that greatest resources can be devoted to improving these policies. Screening requires a systematic review of existing and proposed policies.

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.

Section 75

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act provides that each public authority is required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:-

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status and sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to these obligations, each public authority in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Section 75 Investigation

An investigation carried out by the Equality Commission, under Schedule 9 of the NI Act 1998, arising from the failure of a public authority to comply with the commitments set out in its approved equality scheme. There are two types of Commission investigation, these are as follows:

(1) An investigation of a complaint by an individual who claims to have been directly affected by the failure of a public authority to comply with its approved equality scheme;

(2) An investigation initiated by the Commission, where it believes that a public authority may have failed to comply with its approved equality scheme.

APPENDIX 6**EQUALITY SCHEME ACTION PLAN 2022 – 2027****1.0 EQUALITY**

No.	Objectives / Intended Impact	Action	Performance Indicator	Target Date
1.1	Consider a diverse range of social and other affordable housing solutions that are geographically spread throughout Northern Ireland.	Monitor the number of homes in each council area for categories of need.	Homes completed across different areas in Northern Ireland	Reviewed annually
1.2	Consider new build opportunity, where possible and where demand / NIHE support is available, for Housing for All Schemes	Identify potential schemes	Increased Housing for All Schemes	Reviewed annually
1.3	Improve staff and Board member awareness in respect to Ark Housing's Equality Duties.	All staff and Board members have completed Equality and Diversity training.	100% of Ark Housing staff complete training	Reviewed Annually
1.4	Improve awareness of Ark Housing Equality Scheme	Publish an easy to read, more visual summary of Ark Housing's Equality Scheme for staff and tenants	Published on Ark Housing's social media channels	Reviewed Annually

2.0 DISABILITY

No.	Objectives / Intended Impact	Action	Performance Indicator	Target Date
2.1	To improve staff awareness in respect to Ark Housing's disability obligations	All staff and Board members have completed disability training	100% of Ark Housing staff complete training	Reviewed Annually
2.2	To improve access to services for persons with a disability	Ensure all new-build homes are built to Lifetime Homes Standard	100% new build homes provided to lifetime homes standards	Reviewed Annually
2.3	Ensure all disabled adaptations works are completed within published timescale	Minor adaptations completed within 26 weeks; Major adaptations completed within 52 weeks.	100% target met	Reviewed Annually

3.0 COMMUNICATION

No.	Objectives / Intended Impact	Action	Performance Indicator	Target Date
3.1	Improve communication and positively engage with tenants and ensure information about schemes and services is accessible to all	Analyse and collate tenant profile information to help tailor services to tenants (ie people with disabilities, those with dependents, living in rural areas, tenants where English is not their 1 st language etc)	KPI within the Customer Service Strategy	Reviewed Annually

4.0 STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS

No.	Objectives / Intended Impact	Action	Performance Indicator	Target Date
4.1	Ensure appropriate policies and provisions relating to equality and diversity and disability are in place and that all new and revised policies have been equality screened	All policies equality screened, where applicable	Applicable policies equality screened	Reviewed Annually

5.0 GOVERNANCE

No.	Objectives / Intended Impact	Action	Performance Indicator	Target Date
5.1	To have a more balanced Board composition with respect to gender, age and political opinion	Assess composition of Board & Committee Members and review marketing of opportunities when recruiting	'Balanced Board & Committees	Reviewed Annually