



NORTHERN
I R E L A N D
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

**DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN 2009-2011
and
DRAFT EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSEMENT**

Consultation

Closing date for responses: Friday 28 August 2009

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INTRODUCTION

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was established ten years ago as a result of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998 and has been in operation since 1 March 1999, under its governing legislation, the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) funded by government through the Northern Ireland Office and reporting to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The Commission's current Strategic (or Corporate Plan) covers the period 2006-2009 and a new plan is now required. We wish to align this new Strategic Plan with government's funding cycle in order to assist our financial planning and, accordingly, we are issuing for consultation a two-year Strategic Plan for the period 2009-2011 and an associated Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) (at Annex 2).

As part of this planning process, it is necessary for the Commission to:

- Evaluate progress against the aims and objectives set out in the outgoing Strategic Plan (2006-09)
- Review the vision, mission and values of the organisation
- Identify new aims and areas of work for the next two years
- Consult widely and effectively on our new plan and an associated Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), and
- Prepare a new Strategic Plan for the period 2009-2011.

The purpose of this consultation document is to provide a context for the development of our new Strategic Plan and to offer for consultation a proposed vision, mission, statement of values and priorities for action.

HOW TO RESPOND

The publication of this document marks the start of a 12-week consultation process during which the Commission will consult widely with stakeholders. Feedback will be received through –

- a public consultation event, scheduled to take place on **19 June 2009** in Belfast
- a series of meetings with key organisations, and
- through formal responses received through a questionnaire (at Annex 1).

The closing date for comments is **Friday 28 August 2009**. This draft Strategic Plan will be revised in light of the comments received, with the final version published in September 2009.

We can provide these draft Strategic Plan and EQIA documents in other formats (including Braille, disk, audiocassette or in minority languages to meet the needs of those whose first language is not English) on request to the Commission's office –

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THE COMMISSION'S ROLE

The Commission's role is to promote awareness of the importance of human rights in Northern Ireland, to review existing law and practice and to advise the UK government on what steps need to be taken to protect fully human rights in Northern Ireland.

We base our work on international human rights standards including those of the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe. The Commission, in line with the United Nations 'Paris Principles' guidance of 1993, has status recognition at the UN as a national human rights institution with access to the Human Rights Council.

The Commission operates independently of government through a Board comprising one full-time Chief Commissioner and, currently, nine part-time Commissioners. The Commission normally has a staffing complement of 21.3 full-time equivalent staff. The Commission's budget allocation for 2009-10 is £1.632m, rising in line with inflation to £1.676m in 2010-2011, funded by grant-in-aid from Parliament through the Northern Ireland Office.

Functions

The primary functions of the Commission are to protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. It does this by providing:

- Legal assistance and strategic litigation
- Policy and legislative scrutiny
- Investigations and research
- Reports on the UK Government's international human rights treaty obligations
- Education and training
- Consultation and engagement
- Public relations and promotional work
- Information services and awareness-raising, and
- Advice to government and other stakeholders.

Duties and powers

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is an independent public body established by the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Its powers and duties are derived from sections 69 and 70 of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998* and sections 14-16 of the *Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007*.

Under the *Northern Ireland Act 1998*, the Commission has the following duties:

- To keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness in Northern Ireland of law and practice relating to the protection of human rights
- To advise the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Executive Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to protect human rights
- To advise the Northern Ireland Assembly whether proposed legislation is compatible with human rights standards
- To promote understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights in Northern Ireland by, for example, undertaking or commissioning or otherwise assisting research and educational activities, and
- To provide advice to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights.

In addition, under sections 69 and 70 of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998*, the Commission has the following powers:

- To give assistance to individuals who apply to it for help in relation to proceedings involving law or practice concerning the protection of human rights
- To bring proceedings involving law or practice concerning the protection of human rights

- To conduct such investigations as it considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of exercising its other functions, and
- To publish its advice and the outcome of its research and investigations.

The *Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007* (sections 14-16 which amended sections 69 and 71 of the Northern Ireland Act) gives the Commission the following additional powers, with caveats:

- To institute, or intervene in, legal proceedings concerning human rights where it need not be a victim or potential victim of the unlawful act to which the proceedings relate
- To require a person to provide information and documents in their possession, and to give oral evidence, in respect of an investigation, and
- To enter a specified place of detention in Northern Ireland, in respect of an investigation.

The Commission has agreed a Management Statement and Financial Memorandum with its sponsor Department, the Northern Ireland Office, which reinforces its independence in line with the United Nations 'Paris Principles' guidance of 1993 on the status and role of national human rights institutions.

We will continue to meet the requirements of section 75 of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998* and legislation on human rights, disability discrimination, data protection, freedom of information and public records.

CONTEXT

Since the publication of the outgoing Strategic Plan in 2006, Northern Ireland has experienced pervasive changes in its political, social, economic and cultural life. Given the uncertain environment in which we operate, our approach to planning needs to be flexible so that annual business plans can be adapted to meet changing circumstances and priorities. In this climate of change, our new strategic plan must not only enable us to cement our unique role in the landscape of scrutiny bodies but also increase our relevance in a fast-changing world.

Social and economic factors

The regional economy has to compete in an increasingly competitive global market and, in the present economic downturn, poverty and unemployment rates are on the increase and reductions in public expenditure will result. The Commission will consider the impacts of the current global economic and financial crises on the effective enjoyment of all human rights, and particularly economic, social and cultural rights, and programmes to ensure that the rights of those vulnerable groups in society, which are most at risk from the effects of the recession, are fully protected.

Political factors

In respect of changes to the external environment in which the Commission operates, the return of the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly is having a significant impact on our work in responding to new policy and legislative initiatives, submitting evidence to Assembly committees and interacting with MLAs. This is expected to increase substantially following the devolution of policing and criminal justice responsibilities. The Commission will work closely with the Assembly and political representatives to ensure that the State's human rights obligations are met and to foster a greater appreciation and understanding of our work. We realise debates on human rights issues can be controversial and contested, with differing perceptions shared by sections of the community. The Commission, nevertheless, is committed to promoting fairness for everyone in our community, irrespective of their background. Forthcoming local, national and

European elections will change the political landscape and the Commission will have to anticipate and respond to these developments.

Human rights issues

The Commission faces challenges in addressing the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland, responding to new threats to human rights standards and making rights more clearly relevant to the public. Our work on dealing with the legacy of the conflict will be further developed as we respond to the ongoing statutory inquiries, inquests, investigations on right to life issues, and the report of the Eames/Bradley Consultative Group on the Past. Other new work programmes may emerge, particularly from new frameworks for the regulation of parades currently under examination by the Strategic Review of Parading.

Our new role in jointly monitoring, promoting and protecting the Convention of the Rights of Disabled People with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, and in association with key stakeholders, will also present opportunities and challenges. The Commission also proposes to investigate key human rights concerns through a study into the provision of residential care for older people and monitoring the implementation of previous investigation and research recommendations, particularly in regard to detention.

Throughout our work, we will seek to ensure changes in law, policy and practice to reflect the *Human Rights Act 1998* and international human rights standards, in line with the priorities established by the agreed Strategic Plan.

Bill of Rights

Following the presentation of its advice on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland to government on 10 December 2008, the Commission will continue to advise on the full implementation of its recommendations and anticipates the mainstreaming of awareness-raising, education work and compliance issues in relation to the proposed bill. We intend to build the capacity and knowledge base of key stakeholders, including government departments and other public authorities, to place human rights at the core of their operations. In addition,

promoting a dynamic culture of human rights through our communications, education and public affairs programmes needs to be prioritised.

Administrative issues

The Commission looks forward to further developing its relationships with the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Great Britain, and the Scottish Commission for Human Rights. Through our close working relationship with the Irish Human Rights Commission we will consult on the possibility of a Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland, as first set out in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998.

The Commission is also conscious of its particular contribution among the various scrutiny and oversight bodies that co-exist in Northern Ireland, and with whom we meet on a regular basis. Added to these bodies, we now have the new Commission for Victims and Survivors and the Interim Advocate for Older People. We will develop further memoranda of understanding with these and other relevant bodies, which will enable good working relationships and avoid any areas of potential duplication.

The Commission is committed to creating a progressively more efficient and effective organisation with improved communication and working relationships with key stakeholders. Notwithstanding the current difficult economic climate, we hope in the course of this Strategic Plan to secure new funding streams in order to deliver additional and expanded work programmes. From a review of the performance of the organisation during the past three years, we have demonstrated continuous improvement, realising 37 of the 40 objectives (92.5 per cent) set out in the 2006-2009 Strategic Plan. Further information on our performance can be found in the relevant annual reports, which are available on our website *www.nihrc.org*.

Planning assumptions

For the purposes of this planning framework, the following critical assumptions have been made:

- The recession and the global economic downturn will increasingly impact on the most disadvantaged groups in society

- The legacy of the violent conflict will continue to have an impact on social, economic and cultural affairs in Northern Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Assembly and devolved government arrangements will be sustained
- The Review of Public Administration, including local government reforms, will be implemented
- Progress towards the devolution of policing and criminal justice will continue
- A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland will be consulted on, and legislated for
- Further developments relating to possible constitutional reform in the UK, as mooted in the Green Paper, *Rights and Responsibilities: developing our constitutional framework*, will continue, as will the potential development of a Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland
- A general election in the UK and elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, local councils and the European Parliament will take place
- New potential funding streams may emerge particularly from our formal engagement with the new United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, for which the Commission is designated, under Article 33(2) of the Convention, as one of the independent mechanisms (with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland) to promote, protect and monitor its implementation. Depending on such additional funding, new work programmes may arise, and
- Demand for our services will continue to rise, stretching the capacity of the Commission to meet these needs.

NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

In developing its new plan, the Commission has reviewed the vision, mission, and values of the organisation.

Vision

Our vision is to bring about a society in Northern Ireland where everyone is aware of their internationally recognised human rights and those of others, and can enjoy those rights in a society which respects diversity and in which they can feel safe and valued.

Mission

Our mission is to promote awareness of the importance of human rights, to review existing law, policy and practice and to advise government on what steps need to be taken to fully protect human rights in Northern Ireland.

Values

We carry out our work in accordance with the following values, which all Commissioners and staff will strive to uphold:

Independence

We are accountable for our public funding but independent from any outside influence.

Participation

We work to ensure that individuals and groups feel that the Commission is their Commission, and to avail of people's expertise and share good practice in all areas of our work.

Accessibility

We will ensure that our services are accessible to all and take account of the views expressed to us on our work. Our decisions will be clearly communicated and open to public scrutiny. We will strive to ensure that all our public events are accessible and our publications are as easy to understand as possible.

Fairness

We will conduct our work and build relationships with stakeholders in a professional, objective, and fair manner. We will be objective when assessing evidence, and use internationally accepted rules and principles on human rights as our baseline when doing so.

Effectiveness

We aim to deliver an efficient and effective service to the people of Northern Ireland and to demonstrate value for money.

Sustainability

We are committed to the effective protection of the environment, including the prudent use of natural resources.

Underpinning our vision, mission and values is the Commission's **Equality commitment:**

We are fundamentally committed to equality of opportunity in accordance with the Commission's Equality Scheme. We will promote equality of opportunity and good relations within the Commission as well as in the activities we conduct. We will strive to comply fully with our statutory obligations and we will liaise closely with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to ensure that the two institutions work effectively together. Section 75(1) of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998* requires that the Commission shall, "in carrying out its function relating to Northern Ireland, have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity" between the following nine Section 75 grounds:

- 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, and
- Persons with dependents and persons without.

In addition, and without prejudice to these obligations, in carrying out its functions, the Commission is also committed to promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Key priorities

In reviewing the context of the Commission's work, a number of key priorities present themselves in our future planning and these are detailed below for consultation. These have been identified by Commissioners and staff in areas where major government policy and legislative initiatives are underway or expected, and which could have serious implications for the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland. The proposed priorities for 2009-11 are:

- Ensuring the enactment of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland which reflects the Commission's advice to government
- Responding to the Green Paper on *Rights and Responsibilities: developing our constitutional framework* and other related initiatives that may be taken by government
- Consulting on the possibility of a Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland, as first set out in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998, jointly with the Irish Human Rights Commission
- Securing changes in law, policy and practice to ensure compliance with the *Human Rights Act 1998* and international human rights standards. The intention is to focus on two themes – issues relating to immigration, asylum and access to public services; and issues relating to detention and justice issues, in particular those relating to women and mental health concerns
- Scrutinising the human rights issues associated with 'dealing with the past', including the report of the Consultative Group on the Past
- Seeking to ensure increased compliance by the UK Government with international human rights standards through treaty monitoring and follow up
- Investigating the rights of older people in residential care, and
- Monitoring, promoting and protecting the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, jointly with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and in association with key stakeholders.

Strategic aims

The following aims have been identified:

1. Building and embedding a human rights culture
2. Challenging and seeking to prevent human rights violations
3. Communicating and promoting human rights in an accessible way, and
4. Ensuring organisational effectiveness and efficiency.

A range of strategic objectives are proposed under each of the aims, below. Specific performance indicators reflecting these aims and objectives will be detailed in annual Business Plans. The achievement of the Business Plans will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Commission and reported to the public in annual reports.

Some re-prioritising of these objectives may be required during the lifetime of this plan and the Commission needs to have some capacity to respond to new issues and events as they emerge. In addition, there is a requirement to ensure that appropriate time and resources are dedicated to reflecting on the progress of ongoing work and to monitoring the implementation of previous recommendations and commitments.

Aim 1: Building and embedding a human rights culture

The Commission will encourage and enable duty bearing institutions and other stakeholders to mainstream human rights in their work, and use its powers to ensure compliance by government and public authorities with human rights legislation. In order to effectively embed a dynamic human rights culture, a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is required to strengthen protections and the Commission will work alongside stakeholders for its enactment in legislation.

We will:

- Follow up on our advice to government and seek support for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland

- Work to secure the enactment of legislation reflecting our advice to government on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland
- Work with the Irish Human Rights Commission in consulting on a Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland
- Work with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Scottish Human Rights Commission in regard to the UK Green Paper, *Rights and Responsibilities: developing our constitutional framework*, and related initiatives
- Engage with government and the public sector to ensure compliance with the *Human Rights Act 1998* and international human rights standards
- Develop and deliver training and guidance programmes on human rights compliance issues for government departments, public authorities and service providers
- Encourage the mainstreaming of human rights in the formal education system
- Engage with public representatives and communities with a particular focus on Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist constituencies
- Develop stronger links with the representatives of vulnerable groups, particularly those most affected by the recession
- Where appropriate, share good practice with internationally based organisations in promoting and protecting human rights
- Enhance working relationships with government and administrations at Stormont, Westminster, Dublin, Cardiff and Edinburgh, together with the Council of Europe, the United Nations, the European Union and other bodies internationally, and
- Provide particular support to the civil service, other public authorities, the legal profession, and education sectors in order to promote a greater understanding of human rights compliance issues and the impact of the proposed Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Aim 2: Challenging and seeking to prevent human rights violations

The Commission recognises that there is a need to challenge and address human rights violations and ensure compliance with the *Human Rights Act 1998* and other legal standards. This aim is at the core of the Commission's work in commenting on legislation and policy proposals, carrying out investigations and research, in providing legal services and supporting strategic litigation.

We will:

- Support strategic litigation in order to develop case law and achieve effective outcomes for individual complaints, particularly in regard to European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) Article 2 and 3 issues (right to life and right not to be ill-treated), health and social care, and the accommodation needs of the Traveller community
- Influence changes in law, public policy and practice to address human rights concerns and standards, and respond to key consultation documents in line with the priorities identified in the agreed Strategic Plan
- Complete and disseminate our current investigations in the areas of immigration detention and no access to public funds for certain categories of non-UK nationals
- Complete and disseminate, with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the current research on the nature and extent of human trafficking in Northern Ireland
- Undertake an investigation into the rights of older people in residential care homes
- Monitor the implementation of recommendations from our investigation and research reports
- Monitor the case law of the *Human Rights Act 1998* and international human rights standards
- Engage with the reporting mechanisms of monitoring bodies on the UK's obligations under international human rights treaties and build the capacity of those most directly affected to respond effectively themselves

- Monitor, promote and help protect the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in association with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and other key stakeholders
- Participate in the Council of Europe, United Nations and Commonwealth networks of national human rights institutions (NHRIs)
- Identify and follow up networking opportunities among NHRIs and international NGOs as they occur
- Participate in technical co-operation and training initiatives through the European Group of NHRIs, the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Council of Europe, the European Union and other bodies, where opportunities arise, and
- Continue to engage with the international human rights systems and their reform processes, including the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency and the United Nations' structures and treaty monitoring bodies.

Aim 3: Communicating and promoting human rights in an accessible way

This aim is central to the Commission's work through publications, information and promotions; media and public affairs; education and training; and events. The Commission recognises that, as an organisation working with difficult and sometimes controversial issues, it has a duty to engage with the public at all levels and in a more accessible fashion. This includes a responsibility to make sure that people understand that, while our work is effective, success often depends upon the co-operation and support of others and a clearer appreciation of the value of human rights. This work will also require the promotion of a culture of rights and the potential development of a comprehensive human rights education strategy by the Department of Education as recommended by the United Nations.

We will:

- Further develop our education and training function to include the delivery of training and the development of resources for human rights training
- Investigate with key stakeholders the development of a plan of action in Northern Ireland for human rights education, as recommended by the United Nations General Assembly
- Develop online and media strategies to promote a culture of human rights in Northern Ireland
- Seek to make our information and events accessible to vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups
- Develop improved working relationships with politicians
- Provide legal services training to students and briefings to members of the Law Society and Bar Library, and
- Seek the views of key stakeholders in relation to our performance.

Aim 4: Ensuring organisational effectiveness and efficiency

This aim is central to the Commission's external relationships as well as to its effective governance, operations and efficient management of its resources. The Commission anticipates continuing change and is committed to the search for improvement in its work. We are enthusiastic about embracing opportunities for innovation and being an organisation that is fit for purpose. It is our responsibility to evaluate continually what we do and how we do it. A large part of the Commission's success in the future will come through building a learning organisation, investing in our staff and nourishing a culture of excellence.

We will:

- Secure sufficient resources and manage them effectively, to achieve the Commission's mandate
- Promote a work environment in which innovation and creativity are encouraged, valued and applied

- Demonstrate value for money
- Operate transparent and effective governance arrangements
- Provide new opportunities for continuous learning and development for all Commissioners and staff
- Review our powers under the *Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007*
- Review our structure, staffing and accommodation needs to deliver on our strategic priorities
- Align corporate services functions in support of our strategic priorities
- Ensure, through internal and external audit, that sound financial control systems continue to be in place
- Use national and international benchmarks of excellence to measure performance
- Work towards external accreditation of relevant functions and secure Investor in People status
- Demonstrate commitment to equality, diversity and good relations, and the protection of the information we hold
- Consult on a new three-year Strategic Plan for the Commission for the period 2011-14, and
- Further develop our work with key statutory organisations such as the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Irish Human Rights Commission, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Scottish Human Rights Commission.

Measures of success

The Commission will evaluate and monitor its performance over this plan using the following measures:

- Documented evidence of an increased public profile, understanding of, and confidence in, the Commission's role, as measured by public surveys
- Documented evidence of support for human rights and the Commission's activities among key stakeholders, as measured by an annual stakeholder survey
- Documented evidence of the development of the Commission as a learning organisation, measured by staff surveys and recognition as an Investor in People
- Documented evidence of improvements in the Commission's human resource management benchmarks relating to staff turnover and absenteeism rates
- Documented evidence of the Commission's influence on legislative developments, public policy-making and service delivery
- Documented evidence of the Commission's influence on the development of human rights case law and the effectiveness of its legal interventions
- Documented evidence of the Commission's influence on the concluding observations of United Nations' treaty mechanisms, and other international human rights monitoring systems
- Documented evidence of increased levels of assurance from internal and external audit
- Documented evidence of continuous improvement and increased organisational effectiveness
- Documented evidence of the extent to which the Commission's advice on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is reflected in legislation, and
- Documented evidence of the use of the Commission's information enquiry service and its website.

Annex 1

DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN 2009-2011

CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is seeking the views of its many stakeholders on its new Strategic Plan. This consultation offers an opportunity to influence the future direction of our work and we welcome your views.

To facilitate this process, we have prepared this short questionnaire and would appreciate it if this could be returned before the closing date of this consultation on **Friday 28 August 2009**.

Please note that a separate consultation process exists in regard to our draft Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) which has been produced by the Commission to meet its statutory duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

We can provide the draft Strategic Plan and EQIA documents in alternative formats on request. We will be organising a meeting on Friday 19 June to discuss the Strategic plan. Please contact us for further details of this event.

Please forward completed questionnaires by post, fax or email to:

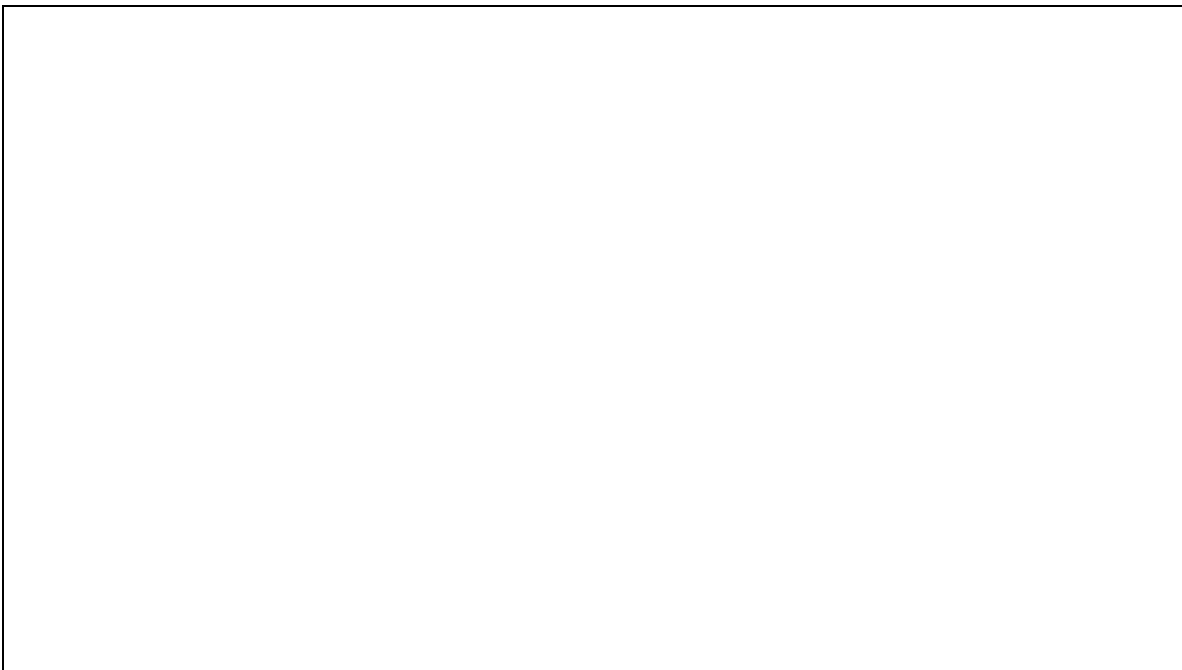
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
Temple Court, 39 North Street
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Textphone: (028) 9024 9066
Fax: (028) 9024 7844
SMS Text: 07786 202075
Email: information@nihrc.org

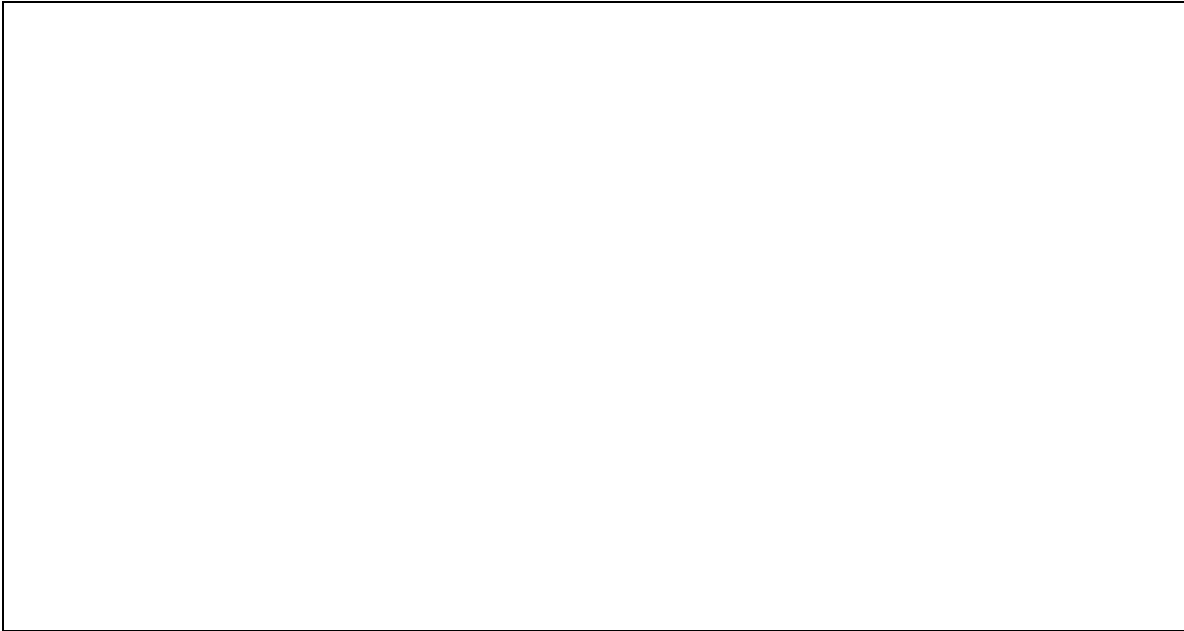
1. Please provide your views on our context and planning assumptions



2. Please provide your views on our proposed vision, mission and values

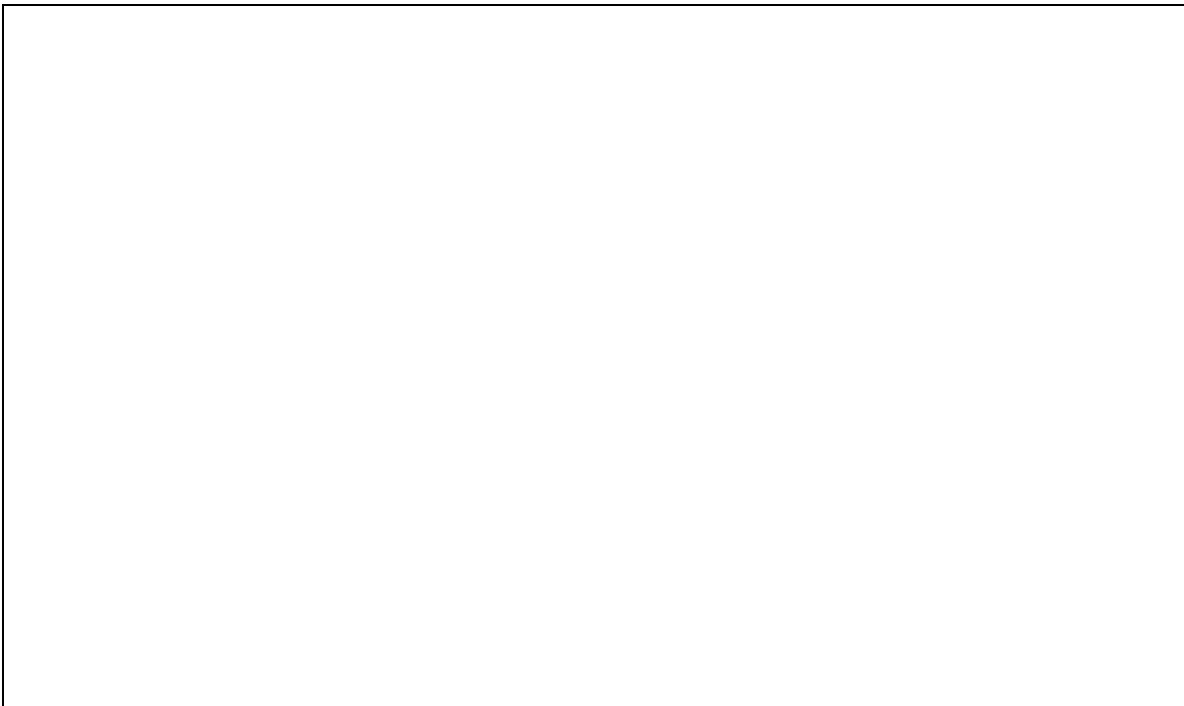


3. Please provide your views on the key priorities that we have identified

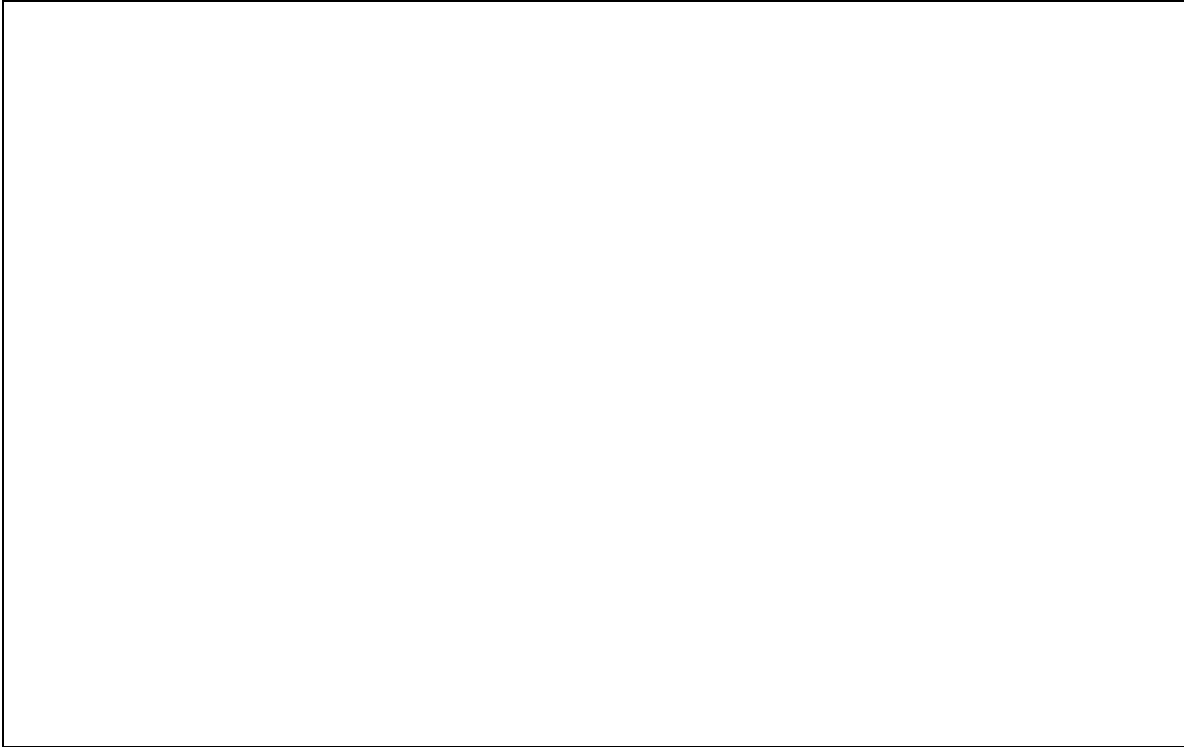


4. Please provide your views on each of the aims and set of objectives that have been identified

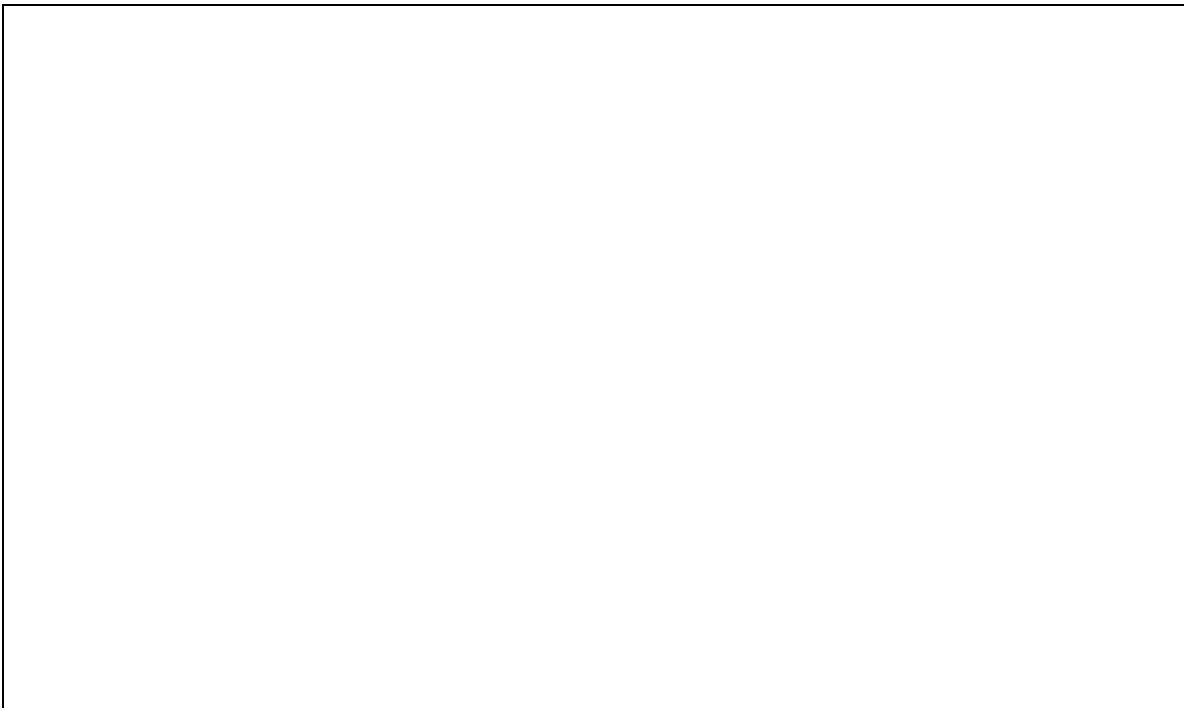
1. Building and embedding a human rights culture



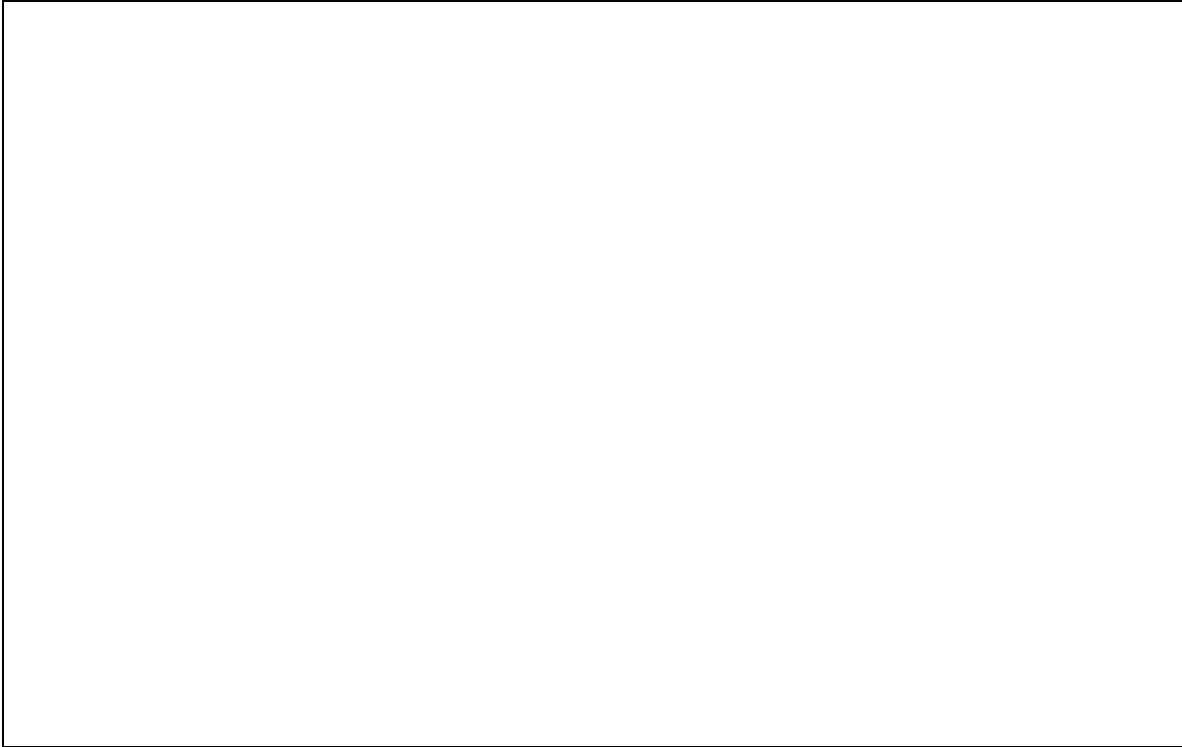
2. Challenging and seeking to prevent human rights violations




3. Communicating and promoting human rights in an accessible way



4. Ensuring organisational effectiveness and efficiency



5. Please provide any other comments you have about the draft Strategic Plan and this consultation process



In order for us to acknowledge completed questionnaires, please complete the following details. You may wish to withhold this information but we will not be in a position to confirm receipt of or respond to your comments.

Name:

Organisation (if applicable):

Address:

Telephone or text phone number:

Email address:

Please note that all responses to this consultation may be made available to the public on request, unless you specifically wish for your completed questionnaire to remain confidential. If we are asked to disclose responses under Freedom of Information legislation, we will do our best to take your preference for confidentiality into account, however you should note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Please tick this box if you wish for your comments to be treated as confidential.

I would like my response to be treated as confidential for the following reasons:

Thank you for your assistance

Annex 2

DRAFT EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EQIA) on the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's draft Strategic Plan 2009-2011

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

Introduction

1. This Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on its key priorities and strategic aims has been produced by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (the Commission) as part of the consultation stage on its draft Strategic Plan 2009-2011, and to meet its statutory duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Commission has conducted a screening exercise on the key priorities and strategic aims of the draft Plan and concluded that its targeting of particular groups such as Travellers, disabled people, older people, and other vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups is justified as part of its wider strategy to encourage equality of opportunity and good relations for these groups. Further, it has identified Protestants, Unionists and Loyalists as under-represented in their interaction with the Commission and where particular attention should be paid. The Commission will annually monitor the impact of the Strategic Plan on relevant groups. If this monitoring shows that the agreed Strategic Plan results in any adverse impact for other groups, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the Commission will ensure the Strategic Plan is revised. In line with the Equality Commission's Guide to Promoting Good Relations, the Commission will also develop a good relations strategy and will consider positive action measures to support this strategy.
2. We would welcome any comments that you may have in terms of this EQIA. During the 12-week consultation process on this EQIA, we will consult widely with stakeholders and hold a series of meetings with key organisations. **The closing date for comments on the draft Strategic Plan and EQIA is Friday 28 August 2009.** A final version will be published in September 2009.

3. If you require this EQIA in an alternative format (including Braille, disk, audiocassette or in minority languages to meet the needs of those whose first language is not English) then please contact:

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SMS Text: 07786 202075
Email: don.leeson@nihrc.org
Website: www.nihrc.org

Background

4. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was established ten years ago as a result of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998 and has been in operation since 1 March 1999, under its governing legislation, the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It is a non-departmental public body (NDPB), funded by government through the Northern Ireland Office and reporting to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
5. The Commission's current Strategic (or Corporate Plan) covers the period 2006-2009 and a new plan is now required. We wish to align this new Strategic Plan with the government's funding cycle in order to assist our financial planning and, accordingly, we are issuing for consultation a two-year Strategic Plan for the period 2009-2011 and this EQIA.
6. The Commission's role is to promote awareness of the importance of human rights in Northern Ireland, to review existing law and practice and to advise the UK government on what steps need to be taken to fully protect human rights in Northern Ireland. We base our work on international human rights standards including those of the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe. The Commission, in line with the United Nations 'Paris Principles' guidance of 1993, has status

recognition at the UN as a national human rights institution with access to the Human Rights Council.

7. The Commission operates independently of government through a Board comprising one full-time Chief Commissioner and currently nine part-time Commissioners. The Commission normally has a staffing complement of 21.3 full-time equivalent staff. The Commission's budget allocation for 2009–10 is £1.632m, rising in line with inflation to £1.676m in 2010-2011, funded by grant-in-aid from Parliament through the Northern Ireland Office. In preparing the draft Plan, we have been very mindful of the current financial climate and the capacity of the Commission in delivering its functions.

Functions

8. The primary functions of the Commission are to protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. It does this by providing:
 - Legal assistance and strategic litigation
 - Policy and legislative scrutiny
 - Investigations and research
 - Reports on the UK Government's international human rights treaty obligations
 - Education and training
 - Consultation and engagement
 - Public relations and promotional work
 - Information services and awareness-raising, and
 - Advice to government and other stakeholders.

Equality commitment

9. The Commission is founded on a commitment to equality and respect for human rights and diversity, which permeates throughout the Commission and its ways of working. Section 75 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission shall, 'in carrying out its function relating to Northern Ireland, have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity' between the following nine Section 75 grounds:

- 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; and
- Persons with dependents and persons without.

In addition and without prejudice to these obligations, in carrying out its functions, the Commission is also committed to promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

10. The Commission's Equality Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on 3 July 2002. This scheme sets out how the Commission proposes to meet its obligations under Section 75 legislation and its implementation. We currently operate according to annual equality plans which provide a strategic direction to the various equality initiatives underway each year. This plan also establishes systematic timescales and objectives for substantial pieces of work designed to promote equality of opportunity across the organisation.

11. During 2007-08, the Commission's Equality Committee undertook the Five Year Review of the Commission's Equality Scheme and completed its Disability Action Plan. Further, equality screening exercises in four major areas of the Commission's work commenced during 2007-08 and were completed shortly after the year end.

12. Building on our Disability Action Plan and subsequent consultation, we will continue to take forward the Plan through

informed interventions. These measures will further equality of opportunity generally, in compliance with the Commission's obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. As stated in our Equality Scheme, the amended policies will be regularly monitored to ensure that no adverse impact occurs. Further, the Commission continues to monitor take-up of its main services during the year against all nine equality categories.

13. In consultation with NIPSA and our Equality Committee, the Commission recently revised its equality monitoring form, which draws heavily on the Equality Commission's Section 75 Monitoring Guide. A training programme for all Commissioners and staff in relation to equality of opportunity and diversity issues took place in 2009 and all external agents or consultants contracted by the Commission meet our obligations under Section 75.
14. All documentation produced by the Commission can be made available in alternative formats, where necessary and on request, for those who are not able to access written English. Substantial work has taken place to improve access to the Commission's offices and website accessibility. Other improvements included the use of Braille business cards for Commissioners and staff. We continue to review the effectiveness of our accessibility arrangements and the Commission has acquired an SMS text number (07786 202075) as another means of people being able to communicate with us (texting is a communication vehicle particularly favoured by younger deaf people).

Identifying key priorities

15. In preparing the Commission's draft Strategic Plan, a number of key priorities were identified by Commissioners and staff in areas where major government policy and legislative initiatives are underway or expected, and which could have serious implications for the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland.

These are:

- Ensuring the enactment of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland which reflects the Commission's advice to government
- Responding to the Ministry of Justice consultation paper – *Rights and Responsibilities: developing our constitutional framework* – and other related initiatives that may be taken by government
- Consulting on the possibility of a Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland, as first set out in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998, (jointly with the Irish Human Rights Commission)
- Securing changes in law, policy and practice to ensure compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998 and international human rights standards. The intention is to focus on two themes – issues relating to immigration, asylum and access to public services; and detention and justice issues in particular those relating to women and mental health concerns
- Scrutinising those human rights issues associated with 'dealing with the past' including the report of the Consultative Group on the Past
- Seeking to ensure increased compliance by the UK Government with international human rights standards through treaty monitoring and follow up
- Investigating the rights of older people in residential care, and
- Monitoring, promoting and protecting the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, for which the Commission is designated under Article 33(2) of the Convention, as one of its independent mechanisms with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, and in association with key stakeholders.

16. The Commission, as a result of its previous work and the consideration of available data and research, has identified support to minority and vulnerable communities such as disabled people, older people and Travellers as particular issues for the Commission to address in its new Strategic Plan. Further, it has identified Protestants, Unionists and Loyalists as under-represented in their interaction with the Commission and where particular attention should be paid. The Commission believes that measures addressing the needs of particularly vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups are justifiable in order to promote equality of opportunity and good relations for these constituencies.

Strategic aims

17. The following strategic aims have been identified:
 1. Building and embedding a human rights culture
 2. Challenging and seeking to prevent human rights violations
 3. Communicating and promoting human rights in an accessible way, and
 4. Ensuring organisational effectiveness and efficiency.

A range of strategic objectives has been developed under each of the above aims. Specific performance indicators reflecting these aims and objectives will be detailed in annual Business Plans. The achievement of the Business Plans will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Commission and reported to the public in annual reports.

18. Some re-prioritising of these objectives may be required during the lifetime of this plan and the Commission needs to have some capacity to respond to new issues and events as they emerge. In addition, there is a requirement to ensure that appropriate time and resources are dedicated to reflecting on the progress of ongoing work, and to monitoring the implementation of previous recommendations and commitments. In addressing the key aims and priorities identified above, the following key strategic actions have been proposed.

Key strategic proposals

19. Under Aim 1: Building and embedding a human rights culture, we intend to encourage and enable duty bearing institutions and other stakeholders to mainstream human rights in their work and use our powers to ensure compliance by government and public authorities with human rights legislation. We believe that in order to effectively embed a dynamic human rights culture, a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is required to strengthen protections, particularly for vulnerable sections of our community, and the Commission will work alongside stakeholders for its enactment in legislation. In this work, we intend to engage with government and the public sector to ensure compliance with the *Human Rights Act 1998* and international human rights standards. In addition, the Commission proposes to liaise with public representatives and communities, with a particular focus on Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist constituencies, and develop stronger links with the representatives of vulnerable groups, particularly those most affected by the recession.
20. Under Aim 2: Challenging and seeking to prevent human rights violations, we recognise that there is a need to challenge and address human rights violations and ensure compliance with the *Human Rights Act 1998* and other legal standards. In particular, we intend to support strategic litigation in order to develop case law and achieve effective outcomes for individual complaints, particularly in regard to European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) Article 2 and 3 issues (right to life and right not to be ill-treated), health and social care, and the accommodation needs of the Traveller community. We also propose to complete and disseminate the Commission's current investigation into no access to public funds for certain categories of non-UK nationals. The Commission also intends to undertake an investigation into the rights of older people in residential care homes and disseminate, with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, research on the nature and extent of human trafficking in Northern Ireland. A major area of work is proposed in regard to monitoring, promoting and helping to protect the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in association with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and other key stakeholders.

21. Aim 3: Communicating and promoting human rights in an accessible way proposes a range of activities relating to publications, information and promotions; media and public affairs; education and training; and events. We recognise that, as an organisation working with difficult and sometimes controversial issues, we have a duty to engage with the public at all levels and in a more accessible fashion to vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups. We intend to be proactive in seeking the views of key stakeholders in relation to our performance.
22. Aim 4: Ensuring organisational effectiveness and efficiency is central to the Commission's external relationships as well as to its effective governance, operations and efficient management of its resources. We anticipate continuing change and are committed to the search for improvement in our work. We believe it is our responsibility to evaluate continually what we do and how we do it. A large part of our success in the future will come through building a learning organisation, investing in our staff and nourishing a culture of excellence. This includes demonstrating a commitment to equality, diversity and good relations, and further developing our work with key statutory organisations such as the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Irish Human Rights Commission, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Scottish Human Rights Commission.

Consideration of available data and research

23. The Commission believes that the draft Strategic Plan will contribute overall to the promotion of equality and good relations across all the s75 categories. Having considered the available research and data relating to the impacts of its key priorities and strategic aims in the draft Strategic Plan, the Commission has concluded that its targeting of particular groups such as Travellers, disabled people, older people, and other vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups is justified as part of its wider strategy to encourage equality of opportunity and good relations for these groups. Further, it has identified Protestants, Unionists and Loyalists as under-represented in their interaction with the Commission and where particular attention should be paid. We examine the data and research relating to the targeting of specific categories and groups in the following sections.

Religious belief / political opinion

24. The Commission has identified that, through its strategic planning process, that Protestants, Unionists and Loyalists are under-represented in their interaction with the Commission. As a result, the Commission is particularly keen to engage with people and groups in these constituencies through meetings, training events, etc. Work in the recent past has included, for example, the organisation of a major conference on faith and human rights in conjunction with the Irish School of Ecumenics, which took place in November 2007. We have also engaged extensively with all political parties during 2007-08, including the main Unionist parties, on a range of human rights issues and, in particular, on the proposed Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.
25. It is worth noting that in an opinion survey, commissioned by the Commission in 2004, strong support for a Bill of Rights was indicated by both main communities (65 per cent of Protestants and 73 per cent of Catholics) and this too has been a consistent feature throughout the three NIHRC surveys commissioned to date. As with the surveys of 1999 and 2001, marked support for social and economic rights continued to be displayed in 2004 by both main communities. These rights include the right to a reliable health service, good education, social security, decent jobs and proper housing. Of all those questioned, 76 per cent in the 2004 survey said that specific protections for social and economic rights were essential or desirable in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Support was stronger among Catholic respondents (83 per cent) than among Protestant respondents (72 per cent). Further, 79 per cent of Catholics and 66 per cent of Protestants wished to see a duty imposed on the Government and public bodies to guarantee social and economic rights.

Race / ethnic origin

26. The ethnic composition of Northern Ireland has changed dramatically in recent years with a large increase in the numbers of migrant workers. It is difficult to quantify the size of minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland and it is widely acknowledged that the latest census figures do not provide a reliable estimate (especially as EU residents are not classified as 'minority ethnic' for census purposes). For example, the Chinese Welfare Association has argued that the Chinese community is approximately twice as large as that represented in the census.

27. A minority ethnic group that consistently suffers multiple indices of deprivation is the Irish travelling community. For example, 27 per cent of Travellers are unemployed, compared to seven per cent of other minority ethnic group members and less than seven per cent of the total population. In total, 63 per cent of Travellers are economically inactive, compared to 36 per cent of other minority ethnic group members and 30 per cent of the total population.
28. The Commission proposes to support strategic litigation in order to develop case law and achieve effective outcomes for individual complaints, particularly in regard to the accommodation needs of the Traveller community.

Age

29. Research commissioned in Great Britain highlights the failures of the NHS in addressing the mental health needs of older people,¹ which supported the findings of the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability (2007).
30. Research carried out by the Commission in 2004² also indicates that there are serious concerns over breaches of older patients' human rights in the level and nature of care they were receiving in the NHS across palliative, acute and ongoing care services. In March 2007, there were 189 residential homes for elderly people in Northern Ireland, providing 3,945 places with 15,194 elderly people in Northern Ireland benefiting from care management, over two fifths (6,444) of whom were in nursing homes.

The Commission proposes to undertake an investigation into the rights of older people in residential care homes as part of the new Strategic Plan.

¹ ACE (2007) *Improving Services and Support for Older People with Mental Health Problems* (The UK Inquiry into Mental Health and Wellbeing in Later Life).

² NIHRC (2004) *Older People's Experience of Health Services in Northern Ireland*.

Disability

31. According to the Labour Force Survey (October – December 2008)³, one in five persons (20 per cent) of working age in Northern Ireland described themselves as having a current long-term disability, slightly higher than for the UK as a whole (19 per cent). This proportion was similar for both men (21 per cent) and women (19 per cent), equating to 117,000 disabled males and 100,000 females.
32. Approximately 63 per cent of people of working age with a disability are economically inactive, compared to 19 per cent of those without disabilities. Further, one-third (34 per cent) of disabled people are in employment compared to 77 per cent of non-disabled persons. The employment rate for those with a disability remains at 32 per cent, in comparison with 79 per cent for those without. The Bamford Review has set a Northern Ireland target of 50 per cent to be in full-time employment. Attitudes among employers, the lack of qualifications and transport difficulties remain key barriers to wider participation in the labour market for people with disabilities.
33. Although the educational qualifications of disabled people have improved slightly in recent years across the UK, they remain considerably less than those of non-disabled people (15 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women achieved degree-level qualifications in 2004/5, compared with 28 per cent of non-disabled men and women).⁴
34. Despite disabled people being major users of health care services in Northern Ireland,⁵ often there are many unmet needs. For example, research by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland highlighted that many disabled women have particular difficulty in accessing key services such as reproductive health care and screening.⁶ The Bamford Review found that mental ill-health affects one in every four people in Northern Ireland. The Review stated that there was “clear

³ Available at: <http://www.detini.gov.uk/cgi-bin/downutildoc?id=2360>, published 25 February 2009.

⁴ As above, 4.

¹¹ DHSSPS (2004) *Equalities and Inequalities in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland: A statistical overview*.

⁶ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2003) *Disabled Women in Northern Ireland: Situation, Experience and Identity*.

evidence of inequalities in the investment associated with mental health and learning disability over many years compared with the other countries within the UK," despite higher levels of ill-health in Northern Ireland.⁷ Describing the costs of failing to address these issues as far reaching, the Review drew attention to impacts on "the quality of life of individuals and their families, their physical health and capacity to make effective use of health services, their employment and productivity and the general economic capital of the entire community".⁸ According to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, people with mental health and learning disabilities face particular barriers in society which can impact on outcomes and life chances.⁹

35. The Commission intends to prioritise its designated role in monitoring, promoting and protecting the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, jointly with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, and in association with key stakeholders.

Sexual orientation

36. The Commission found, in its report on enhancing the rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Northern Ireland (2001) that laws, policies and practice discriminate extensively against lesbian, gay and bisexual people. The Commission will keep under review its recommendations in this regard.

Consideration of adverse impact

37. Equality and human rights are inextricably linked. From its inception, the Commission has worked tirelessly to promote human rights and equality issues in public policy and practice, and in legislation, using the full range of functions and the powers available to it. However, given the nature of the Commission's work, and the fact that much of our work involves

⁷ DHSSPS (2006) The Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability (Northern Ireland). Available at: <http://www.rmhdni.gov.uk>.

⁸ Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability (Northern Ireland), Reform and Modernisation of Mental Health and Learning Disability Services – Strategic Priorities for the First Phase of Review Implementation, Briefing Paper (October 2006).

⁹ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland*.

working through others to achieve these aims, tangible outcomes can be difficult to identify.

38. In assessing the impact of the proposed key priorities and strategic aims of the draft Strategic Plan, the Commission considered, in its initial screening exercise, whether there would be any differential impact on any of the Section 75 groups and if particular groups have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the draft Plan. Consequently, and after consideration of the available data and research, the Commission concluded that its targeting of particular groups such as Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist groups; Travellers; disabled people; older people; other vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups, is justified as part of its wider strategy to encourage equality of opportunity and good relations.
39. In addition, we have also considered whether there are opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity or better community relations either by the Commission itself or working with others in the wider community. The Commission remains committed to promoting equality of opportunity through all aspects of its work and views this draft Strategic Plan as progressing and consolidating many of the initiatives already put in place. Indeed, we believe that the draft Strategic Plan has the potential to further promote equality of opportunity and good relations within Northern Ireland.
40. Through its strategic planning process, the Commission acknowledges that there are many pervasive social, cultural and economic issues that continue to conspire to create and sustain inequalities. To remedy these inequalities, however, will require the co-ordinated efforts from government with support from the private sector.

Measures to mitigate adverse impact

41. At this time, the Commission believes that the implementation of this draft Strategic Plan will have a positive and long lasting effect on a number of groups which are categorised under the nine equality dimensions of Section 75. By way of example, projects included in the draft Strategic Plan address the residential care needs of older people, and the accommodation

needs of Travellers which will assist in promoting equality of opportunity and better rights protections. In addition, through its new Strategic Plan, the Commission intends to monitor, promote and protect the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, jointly with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, and in association with key stakeholders. Our proposed work on helping to enact a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland will also, in our opinion, greatly strengthen protections for vulnerable groups and Section 75 categories. The Commission will also further develop its work with key statutory organisations such as the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Irish Human Rights Commission, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Scottish Human Rights Commission. We will also seek to make our information and events accessible to vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups. The Commission has considered ways of delivering these actions which have a less adverse effect on, or which better promote, equality of opportunity for the relevant equality category.

42. As part of this exercise the following questions were considered:

- Have all options been explored?
- How does each option further or hinder equality of opportunity?
- How does each option reinforce or challenge stereotypes which constitute or influence equality of opportunity?
- What are the consequences for the group concerned and for the public authority of not adopting an option more favourable to equality of opportunity?
- How will the relevant representative groups be advised of the new or changed policy or service?
- What are the costs of implementing each option? Will the costs and benefits to the relevant group of implementing the option outweigh the costs to the public authority or other groups?

- Does the public authority have international obligations which would be breached by, or could be furthered by, each of the options?
43. The Commission believes that from this consideration the differential impact on targeting particular groups such as Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist groups; Travellers; disabled people; older people; other vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups is justified as part of its wider strategy to encourage equality of opportunity and good relations for these groups. The Commission will annually monitor the impact of the Plan on relevant groups. If this monitoring shows that the agreed Strategic Plan results in any adverse impact for other groups, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the Commission will ensure the Strategic Plan is revised. In line with the Equality Commission's Guide to Promoting Good Relations, the Commission will also develop a good relations strategy and consider positive action measures to support this strategy. Ongoing training of all staff in relation to equality of opportunity and good relations will remain a priority. When external agents or consultants are contracted to work for the Commission, their contractual responsibilities to meet our obligations under the Section 75 responsibilities will also be made clear. Having considered available data and research and the potential of adverse impact, it is proposed that the Commission will build on its existing work in taking forward its draft Strategic Plan 2009-2011.

Formal consultation

44. The Commission wishes to consult as widely as possible on the findings included in this EQIA. The following actions are proposed:
- This report will be issued to all consultees listed in our Equality Scheme and to any members of the public on request.
 - Prominent advertisements will be placed inviting the public to comment on this matter in accordance with normal practice.

- A copy of the EQIA will be posted on the Commission's website www.nihrc.org.
- Individual consultation meetings will be arranged on request with representatives of particular interest groups as requested.
- The report will be made available on request in other formats.

The arrangements for consultation are being co-ordinated by the Head of Corporate Services, to whom all enquiries should be made. The closing date for responses is **Friday 28 August 2009**.

Following the formal consultation period and consideration of the findings from the consultation, the Commission will reach a decision in terms of the EQIA process and will ensure that such decisions are implemented through the new Strategic Plan.

Publication of the results of equality impact assessment

45. The outcomes of this EQIA will be published on the Commission's website www.nihrc.org. It will also be made available in different formats on request where appropriate.

Monitoring for adverse impact

46. The Commission will annually monitor the impact of the Strategic Plan on relevant groups. If this monitoring shows that the agreed Strategic Plan results in adverse impact for other groups, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity and good relations to be promoted, the Commission will ensure that the Strategic Plan will be revised.

4 June 2009

APPENDIX 1: Examples of Groups by Equality Categories

'Age'

For most purposes, the main categories are: those under 18; people aged between 18 and 65; and people over 65. However, the definition of age groups will need to be sensitive to the policy under consideration.

For example, (i) in relation to employment policies, the middle aged are often a vulnerable group, pensionable age is different for men and women and legal ages for working and voting vary; and (ii) in relation to policies concerning young people, then narrower age bands are likely to be more appropriate.

'Marital status'

Married people; unmarried people; divorced or separated people; widowed people

'Men and women generally'

Men (including boys); women (including girls); transgender people; transsexual people

'Persons with a disability'

Persons with a disability as defined in Sections 1 and 2 and Schedules 1 and 2 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

'Persons with dependants'

Persons with primary responsibility for the care of a child; persons with personal responsibility for the care of a person with a disability; persons with primary responsibility for the care of a dependant elderly person

'Political opinion'

Unionists generally; Nationalists generally; members/supporters of any political party; other

'Racial group'

Chinese; Irish Traveller; Indian; Pakistani; Bangladeshi; Black African; Black Caribbean; White; mixed ethnic group; any other ethnic group; nationality

'Religious belief'

Protestant; Catholic; Hindu; Jewish; Islam / Muslim; Sikh; Buddhist; other religion; people of no religious belief

'Sexual orientation'

Gay; lesbian; bisexual; heterosexual

(This list is not exclusive but may be amended, or added to, as appropriate.)