

**EQIA –ACCESS**

**CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

<b>Report Reference</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Belfast City Council (BCC) Response</b>
Equality Commission 1.1	The Equality Commission has been asked for advice by the Council in relation to its proposal to developing qualitative and quantitative monitoring strategies to monitor its various policies including the policy under consideration. The Commission urges all designated bodies to develop such strategies. In addition the Commission would urge the Council to liaise with other Councils which implement similar policies and which may therefore also be considering possible monitoring strategies. The Commission is committed to ensuring that best practice in relation to Section 75 matters is shared and common problems and solutions identified	Noted. The Council is aware of the requirement and benefit of effective monitoring systems. The Council is currently developing comprehensive monitoring systems both quantitatively and qualitatively and will liaise with the Equality Commission and other Councils in due course.
1.2	The Commission would urge the Council to adopt monitoring systems and classification strategies which allow it to determine if it is promoting equality of opportunity. As the Council is aware Section 75 requires that Councils monitor their policies for adverse impact and to ensure that the information and services they provide are provided in such a way as to ensure equality of opportunity.	Noted. See above.
1.3	In relation to monitoring and the issue of disability, the Commission would be keen to ensure that monitoring systems be based on the social model rather than the medical model of disability. Monitoring questions should seek to determine what	We agree that the social model is more inclusive. Further discussions will take place during the development of monitoring systems.

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Equality Commission 1.3 contd.	reasonable adjustments people with disabilities require to ensure that they enjoy equality of opportunity. It is also important that monitoring systems address the issue of representation amongst those using a particular service or accessing a premise.	Refer to 1.1 above.

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<p>Northern Ireland Committee-Irish Congress of Trade Unions Introduction 2.1</p>	<p>There was a lot of information contained in this EQIA and obviously considerable work has gone into producing it. However, while useful and interesting to a point, the information and the data quoted produced a rather patchy impact assessment. It appears that the information and the data used to consider the impact of the policy has, apart from the information around physical access in relation to disability, mainly been drawn from Service Reviews. This is probably why there is no substantial information on how the opening hours of, for example, leisure centres and community centres, impacts on younger people, those with dependents and older people.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>Council services are reviewed on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Discussions are currently being held with Users, Staff, and Trade Unions in relation to services including opening hours.</p>
<p>2.2</p>	<p>We note that the Council is committed to developing effective monitoring systems and that these will include considering both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Section 6). This is welcome and we would recommend that these be put in place as a matter of urgency and that the policy be further assessed in the light of these.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>See monitoring statement at 1.1</p> <p>The policy is continually reviewed.</p>

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2.3	<p>We appreciate that this impact assessment relates only to physical access to Council buildings and their associated facilities. However, given that pricing policy and location of buildings also have an impact on accessibility, we would recommend that the Council takes a joined - up approach to access and develops an access policy that incorporates all the issues surrounding access so that a clearer picture may emerge.</p> <p>Below are specific comments we wish to make on the EQIA</p>	<p>We agree that policies need to be better aligned e.g. Access and Pricing.</p> <p>Joint meetings will be arranged with the Pricing and Access EQIA Review Teams.</p>
<b>3. The Access Policy</b> 3.1.1	<p>Has a separate screening/EQIA been carried out on access to parks and open spaces? If not, will this be done and when? It would be useful to identify those buildings that are either leased or managed, particularly if these are leased or managed by organisations that are not covered by S 75 and therefore not obliged to screen their policies or conduct equality impact assessments.</p>	<p>Yes, a separate screening has been conducted on the Council's Parks and Open Spaces. This policy has been screened in and was to be subject to an EQIA this current year. However due to the development of a new strategy in Parks and Open Spaces the equality considerations will now be integrated into the development of the new strategy. A further screening will be conducted in due course.</p>

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3.1.2	Has the physical distribution of operational locations already been screened/ impact assessed? If not will this be done and when?	As part of the equality agenda all new facilities are subjected to an impact assessment.
3.1.3	It might have been better to state the aim of the policy at the beginning of this section. Reference should also be made in this paragraph to the Council's obligations under the DDA, particularly the forthcoming reasonable adjustment duty and how this will be addressed in terms of resources	Noted. An amendment has been made
<p data-bbox="188 679 432 783"><b>4.Consideration of Available Data and Research</b></p> <p data-bbox="188 831 416 1078">4.6 Public Consultation Surveys 1999 &amp; 2001; and 4.7 Access Focus Group Meeting 17/1/2002</p>	<p data-bbox="461 716 1480 788">What action has the Council taken on the points raised through the Surveys and the Focus Group meeting?</p>	<p data-bbox="1541 716 2045 1155">As a result of feedback from the Public Consultation exercises the Council adopted 'Improving Communication and Access to Council Services' as one of its twelve Priorities for the period 2003- 2006. A number of specific actions will be undertaken in each year which can be found on pages 30-31 of the Council's Corporate Plan and on the Council's website at <a href="http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/PDF/BC_CCorporatePlanFinalVersion.pdf">http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/PDF/BC_CCorporatePlanFinalVersion.pdf</a></p> <p data-bbox="1541 1198 2018 1334">The issues raised in the Focus Group have been addressed and communicated back to the stakeholders on an annual basis.</p>

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<p>4.9 Accessibility Programme of Works</p>	<p>This paragraph states ‘ In accordance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (NI)1995, the Council has undertaken to carry out a rolling programme of work with a view to removing, within reasonable, practicable and <i>economic</i> (my italics) limitations, all physical obstacles to access.’ While the DDA allows for factors such as cost to be taken into consideration when making reasonable adjustments, this should be proportionate to the size and finance available to the organisation. We note at 4.10.2 that the Council states that ‘significant annual funding for access has been set aside in the Council’s budget.’ This is welcome but an indication of how much this will be would have been useful.</p>	<p>A figure of £3.0 million funding has been set aside for each of the past 4 years. This covers both maintenance upgrades and disability alteration work to BCC properties. A contract to carry out DDA work at Leisure Centres is currently in progress at a cost of £2.5 million and £0.5 million has recently been spent at the Waterfront Hall to address works from its DDA Audit.</p>
<p>4.9.2</p>	<p>What was the outcome of the disability access audits? What changes were recommended and which have been made?</p>	<p>To date, approximately 150 DDA Audits have been carried out on Council properties and the programme of audits is ongoing. Issues emerging from the Audits are incorporated into a programme of works and are being implemented.</p>

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		The Council has adopted the BS8300 as the standard for compliance with the DDA Act.
4.9.3	Was the Waterfront Hall report accepted? Did it identify barriers to access? Are its recommendations being acted upon?	The DDA facilities upgrade programme for the Belfast Waterfront Hall was completed in January 2004. The proposals from the initial audit which was carried out was taken to the 'Belfast Waterfront Hall Access Group' for consultation in 2002, prior to the works contractors being appointed. A reformed Access group met in December 2003 to consult on the actual completed works and a snagging list has been completed on this basis. It is proposed that this new Facilities Access Group will meet twice a year or when required.

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4.9.4	<p>We note that the Council will audit open spaces for which it has a responsibility. However, it has been made clear earlier in the document that open spaces are not covered by the impact assessment. Is the audit being carried out as an alternative to screening and impact assessing (if the screening exercise showed a need for an EQIA)?</p>	<p>See previous comments re: Parks and Open Spaces at 3.1.1  An audit of Parks and Open Spaces specifically to determine suitable use and access by disabled people is currently in progress. Outcomes of the audits will be addresses and a programme of works will follow.</p>
4.10 Service Reviews	<p>Service reviews should not be used as an alternative to screening and impact assessing where the need for an EQIA has been identified. The 5C's of Best Value are not the same as the criteria to be used to assess if policies might have an adverse impact on any of the affected groups, nor do they appear to allow for consideration of measures which might mitigate any adverse impact or the consideration of alternative policies.</p>	<p>Noted. However it is unreasonable to conduct an EQIA when the policy in question is being reviewed or changed. Equality Considerations are now embedded into policy development processes at Belfast City Council.  Whilst BCC note the difference between Best Value legislation and the equality legislation (S75), they are not mutually exclusive in developing policies.</p>

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4.10.2c.f.4.9. above		See above
4.10.3 Waterfront Hall	Again a Best Value consultation is not the same as EQIA.	See above
4.11.3 Building Control (City Hall)	This paragraph is somewhat confusing. Is it about how people access a service or a building? Surely this EQIA is about access to Council buildings and associated facilities e.g. leisure centre facilities? A service is not a facility in the sense of what this EQIA is covering. Should access to this be included by a different screening exercise/ EQIA?	Noted. The paragraph has been amended.
4.12 User Surveys	What criteria were used to monitor through the Best Value Review? How do these differ from those recommended in the Equality Commission's Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment? If the User Surveys have not collected data on or monitored across the nine groups how relevant for the purpose of the EQIA were they?	BCC widened its activities to include the S 75 categories. See monitoring statement at 1.1.
5.4 Racial Group	Consideration should be given to putting up signs in other languages as well as introducing pictorial signage. This should be undertaken as part of the Council's commitment to the good relations duty of S75.	The issue of signage has been dealt with as a separate exercise. The DDA Group opted for tactile/ pictorial signage and English only. Research is underway on the development of a language policy.

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5.5 Age	The intention to extend access audits to cover age is welcome.	Noted.
5.5.1	This paragraph needs clarification. Apart from the fact that it does not appear to be age- specific related, it would be useful to have examples of which groups are referred to and in what circumstances specific groups would have sole use of a facility for a period of time. A policy is referred to. Which policy is this? Has it been impact assessed?	Paragraph amended for clarity.
5.5.2	Again, it would have been useful to have more information on the policy referred to.	The Use of City Hall and Civic Hospitality policy has been revised and all equality issues considered in its development. Consultation is ongoing.
5.8.1 Gender	As with 5.5.1 above, additional information is needed in this paragraph.	There is universal access to buildings. However the service may be restricted to certain groups for a specific period of time. The final report has been amended for clarification.

Report Reference	Comments	BCC Response
5.10 Dependants	This EQIA should be directly addressing the issues of access for those with dependants. It is not good enough to say that this is being ‘indirectly addressed by the Council’s Access Audits.’ What does this mean?	The access audits carried out are all inclusive i.e. they have been revised to include all S75 categories. For further clarification see 5.1. The main report has been amended for clarity.
6.1 Measures to Mitigate/ Alternative Policies	The measures listed here are welcome. However, given that the data and research considered was, apart from disability, extremely limited it is difficult to come to any firm conclusions on whether the policy on access currently has significant impact on any of the affected groups.	Noted. BCC continually monitors and reviews its policies and practices.
7.1 Formal Consultation	It would have been useful to have had a list of the dates, times and venues of the consultation meetings for the general public included in this section.	Noted. Notification of consultation was included in the covering letter, on the website and on the newspaper advertisement. Future EQIA’s will include dates of consultation in the main body of the report.
<b>North Belfast Senior Citizens Forum</b> <b>1.1</b>	A persistent topic is dog-fouling in public parks. Forum members would like to see closer co-ordination between council employees and dog warden on the issue of enforcement of byelaws on fouling. At present there seems to be little or no deterrent to owners of offending animals. Fouling is an issue which affects access to parks and public places by people of all ages.	The Council is developing a Parks and Open Space Strategy. The consultation process is ongoing. Your comments have been forwarded to the appropriate department and included in the consultation response.

1.2	There are issues regarding accessibility in some council facilities. The Forum is particularly concerned there is no lift or provision in Loughside Recreation Centre. The centre is based in an area containing large numbers of elderly people. One pensioner group actually meets in Lough side but numbers are restricted to those who can climb stairs. This may be in contravention of the DDA Act 1995.	A DDA group exists within the Council to work on DDA Act compliance. Your concerns regarding this facility have been forwarded to the appropriate section and they will respond to your enquiry.
1.3	Finally there is concern over lack of public toilets facilities in certain parts of the city. It has been noted that conveniences in Library Street have been closed without any extra provision made in the vicinity.	Public conveniences are subject to a service review. Your comments regarding public conveniences have been forwarded to the appropriate section.
1.3	Access to public parks for older people especially the disabled is restricted due to the lack of toilet facilities. Several parks in Belfast have no toilet facilities at all, e.g. the Waterworks and Alexander park while those that do have opening times restricted to 'special occasions'. While we understand the reasons that lead up to these closures we believe that there are ways around these problems e.g. attendants and visible defensible location. CCTV outside vulnerable conveniences might be an option. Disabled older people are effectively discriminated against through lack of provision in these cases.	Your comments have been forwarded. Please see above comments regarding Parks and Open Space Strategy.