

**Section 75 and Schedule 9
The Northern Ireland Act 1998**



Access Policy

Equality Impact Assessment

Belfast City Council

Final Report

August 2004

The Access Policy

An Equality Impact Assessment

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The Access Policy for Belfast City Council

An Equality Impact Assessment

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1** Belfast City Council remains committed to fulfilling its responsibilities under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. In its Equality Scheme, the Council gave an undertaking to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on each policy or group of co-joined policies where screening had indicated significant issues in relation to one or more of the nine equality dimensions.
- 1.2** The Council's Access Policy was identified as one such policy and, following consultation, was scheduled to be carried out in Year Two of the EQIA programme. The stated aim of the Access Policy is: "As far as is reasonably practicable and within its resource limitations, the Council will ensure that its buildings and associated facilities are accessible to all and that fair and equitable treatment will be given in the use of such buildings and associated facilities."
- 1.3** For the purposes of this EQIA, the policy has been restricted to buildings and associated facilities owned or managed by the Council. The Policy Aim is:

"As far as is reasonably practicable and within its resource limitations, the Council will ensure that its buildings and associated facilities are accessible to all and that fair and equitable treatment will be given in the use of such buildings and associated facilities."

The review will not consider parks or open spaces but will take into account access to buildings where entry may be restricted by opening hours and/or closure days to the surrounding area.

- 1.4** The impact assessment will consider physical access to Council owned and managed buildings, together with facilities contained within these buildings. The EQIA will review opening hours, closure days and signage to and within each building and associated facilities but will not consider the physical distribution of operational locations across Belfast
- 1.5** The following buildings and facilities are considered within the scope of the Access Policy: Leisure Centres & Swimming Pools; Community Centres; Belfast City Hall & Cecil Ward Building; Waterfront Hall; Ulster Hall / Group Theatre; Markets (St George's Market; Smithfield Market); Sports Pavilions, Playing Fields and Grounds; Belfast Castle; Malone House; Consumer Advice

Centre; Port Health Office; Buildings within Parks & Open Spaces; Cemeteries; Mortuary; Crematorium; Belfast Zoo; Civic Amenity Sites and Public Conveniences.

1.6 In carrying out the EQIA the Council has taken into account information and data from a number of primary sources including the Council's Disability Access Group and Accessibility Programme of Works.

1.7 An assessment of the impact of the Council's Access Policy was then conducted in respect of the nine equality dimensions and in respect of multiple disadvantage.

1.8 The Council has drawn up the following plan to action the recommendations in this report

- Draw up an detailed action plan
- Communicate action plan to stakeholders
- Establish liaison with other relevant EQIA teams
- The Council will broaden its Access Audits to cover all nine equality dimensions and in particular will also address issues of wayfinding (signage) and mobility (e.g. age and dependancy).
- The Council will keep under review its communication systems to advise the public of opening and closing times.
- The Council is committed to developing effective monitoring systems. Knowledge of the uptake of services provided by the Council and the impact of policies on the different Section 75 dimensions will assist us in assessing progress towards equality of opportunity. We are, within our ongoing development of monitoring systems, considering both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
- Ongoing consultation with users, staff, trade unions in relation to levels of service and operations
- BCC will continue to host the annual focus group for all stakeholders on Access issues.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Background

- 2.1.1** Under the statutory duties contained within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, Belfast City Council gave an undertaking to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on each policy or group of co-joined policies where screening had indicated that there may be significant implications in relation to one or more of the nine equality dimensions.
- 2.1.2** This report concludes the Formal Consultation stage of the EQIA relating to the publication of the results of the EQIA Access Policy.
- 2.1.3** Further copies of this EQIA report are available on the Council's website at www.belfastcity.gov.uk.
- 2.1.4** If you have any queries about this document, and its availability in alternative formats (including Braille, disk and audio cassette, and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English) then please contact:

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2.2 Section 75 and the Statutory Duties

2.2.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires each public authority, when carrying out its functions in relation to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine categories of persons, namely:

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

2.2.2 Without prejudice to its obligations above, the public authority must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

2.2.3 The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is being carried out in accordance with the Procedure for Conduct of Equality Impact Assessments outlined in the Guide to Statutory Duties. The seven separate elements of the EQIA are:

- Consideration of available data and research;
- Assessment of Impacts;
- Consideration of measures that might mitigate any adverse impacts and alternative policies that might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity;
- Formal Consultation;
- Decision by the Public Authority;
- Publication of results of the EQIA;
- Monitor for Adverse Impact.

2.2.4 The purpose of conducting the Equality Impact Assessment is as follows:

- To identify adverse impacts and to consider mitigating factors which will eliminate adverse impact;
- To consider alternative policies which would better promote equality of opportunity

2.2.5 The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland approved Belfast City Council's Equality Scheme in April 2001. The Scheme outlines how the Council proposes to fulfil its statutory duties under Section 75. Following approval of the Scheme, existing policies were screened to assess impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity or the duty to promote good relations using the following criteria:

- Is there any evidence of higher or lower participation or uptake by different groups?

- Is there any evidence that different groups have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the particular policy issue?
- Is there an opportunity to promote equality of opportunity between the relevant different groups, either by altering the policy, or by working with others in government or in the larger community, in the context of the policy?
- Have consultations with relevant groups, organisations or individuals indicated that policies of that type create problems specific to any relevant group?

2.2.6 A report describing the results of the screening process is available from the Council's Equality Officer (contact details on page one).

2.2.7 Following screening, a schedule of EQIAs was drawn up and the EQIA on the Access Policy was scheduled for assessment in Year Two.

2.3 Belfast City Council

2.3.1 Belfast City Council is the largest of the 26 District Councils in Northern Ireland, serving a population of 277,391 people (NI census, 2001). The Council spends more than £100 million each year and directly employs more than 2,300 people.

2.3.2 The Council is responsible for the delivery of key services within Belfast and in particular those relating to:

- Refuse collection and disposal;
- Street cleansing;
- Health and environmental services;
- Community services;
- Indoor and outdoor leisure;
- Parks and recreational facilities;
- Support for the arts, tourism and economic development.

2.3.3 The City Council is structured around seven Departments:

- Chief Executive's;
- Client Services;
- Contract Services;
- Corporate Services;
- Development;
- Health and Environmental Services;
- Legal Services.

2.3.4 The Council operates through 102 operational locations across Belfast (for further details of these locations please contact the [Corporate Services](#) Section of the Council).

2.4 City Equality Profile

2.4.1 Although there is extensive detail in respect of some of the equality dimensions defined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, there is little or no detail on others. In some cases, details are available only for Northern Ireland rather than the Belfast City Council area. Key statistics from the 2001 Census became publicly available in December 2002. According to initial findings from the 2001 Census the total population of Belfast City is 277,391.

2.4.2 Religious Belief

The 2001 Census showed a resident Belfast population of 277,391. Of these, more than 47% were Catholic and almost 49% were from the main Protestant denominations of Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Methodist. People of no religion and those who chose not to answer amounted to just over 4%.

2.4.3 Political Opinion

Representation among the 51 Councillors in Belfast City Council (as from March 2002) is as follows:

Sinn Féin	14
Ulster Unionist Party	11
Democratic Unionist Party	10
Social Democratic and Labour Party	9
Alliance Party	3
Progressive Unionist Party	3
Independent	1

2.4.4 As local government elections in Northern Ireland are conducted using the single transferable vote system of proportional representation, the political composition of the Council can be said to broadly reflect the political views of the wider Belfast population.

2.4.5 The Westminster Election of 2001 resulted in three representatives from the Unionist tradition being elected in North, South and East Belfast constituencies and a representative from the Nationalist tradition being elected in West Belfast.

2.4.6 Racial Group

Results from the 2001 census shows that the white population of Belfast constitutes 98.63% with ethnic minority groups making up 1.37% of the City's population. Since the percentages are quite small estimated numbers have been used here instead.

Chinese	1,331	Black African	139
Mixed	721	Other Black	83
Other Ethnic Group	471	Other Asian	83
Indian	443	Bangladeshi	55
Irish Traveller	250	Black Caribbean	55
Pakistani	166		

2.4.7 Age

The breakdown of the Belfast population by age as derived from the 2001 Census shows that just over 21% of the population is under 15 years of age and more than 15% is over the age of 65.

2.4.8 Marital Status

In 2001 Belfast's population comprised a bigger proportion of single people, at 41%, than any other marital status. 37% of the City's population is married and an additional 2% are 're-married'. 9% of the population is widowed, 5% is separated and a further 5% is divorced.

2.4.9 Sexual Orientation

The Coalition on Sexual Orientation estimates that the gay and lesbian community in Belfast represents about 6% of the population which amounts to approximately 16,643 people

2.4.10 Gender

Belfast's gender breakdown in 2001 comprised 129,778 males and 147,613 females representing 47% and 53% respectively.

2.4.11 Disability

The 2001 Census indicates that almost 45%¹ of households in Belfast are home to one or more persons with a 'limiting long-term illness'.

¹ 'A self-assessment of whether or not a person has a limiting long term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities or the work they can do, including problems that are due to old age'.

2.4.12 Dependency

2001 Census figures indicate that there are 34,636 households with dependant children in Belfast out of a total of 113,934 households (amounting to 30.4%). In addition 45% of households contain at least one resident who considers themselves to have a limiting long-term illness which may entail dependency.

2.4.13 Age and Disability

The "Labour Force Survey" for Spring 2001, shows that there are over 201,000 disabled people of working age in Northern Ireland, accounting for just under a fifth of the total working age population.

3.0 The Access Policy

3.1 Remit of Access EQIA

3.1.1 The Policy Aim is:

“As far as is reasonably practicable and within its resource limitations, the Council will ensure that its buildings and associated facilities are accessible to all and that fair and equitable treatment will be given in the use of such buildings and associated facilities.”

3.1.2 For the purposes of this EQIA, the policy has been restricted to buildings and associated facilities owned or managed by the Council². The review will not consider parks or open spaces but will take into account access to buildings where entry may be restricted by opening hours and/or closure days to the surrounding area. The scope of this EQIA will not include Traveller Sites as the responsibility for Traveller Sites will transfer to the Housing Executive.

3.1.3 The impact assessment will consider physical access to Council owned and managed buildings, together with facilities contained within these buildings. The EQIA will review opening hours, closure days and signage to and within each building and associated facilities but will not consider the physical distribution of operational locations across Belfast.

3.1.4 The following buildings and facilities are considered within the scope of the Access Policy:

- **Leisure Centres, Recreation Centres & Swimming Pools** (Andersonstown, Whiterock, Olympia, Beechmount, Falls, Shankill, Ballysillan, Loughside, Grove, Maysfield, Ozone/Tennis Arena/Laserquest, Avoniel, Ballymacarrett);
- **Community Centres** (Ardoyne, Concorde, Dee Street, Divis, Donegall Pass, Duncairn; Finaghy, Glen Road, Hammer, Highfield, Horn Drive, Inverary, Knocknagoney, Ligoniel, Markets, Morton, North Queen Street, Olympia, Sandy Row; Suffolk, Whiterock, Woodvale);
- **Civic Buildings** (Belfast City Hall & Cecil Ward Building);
- **Halls/Theatres** (Waterfront Hall, Ulster Hall / Group Theatre);
- **Markets** (St George's, Smithfield);
- **Pavilions, Playing Fields and Sports' Grounds** (Alexandra Park, Ballysillan P/F, Botanic Park, Boucher Road P/F, City of Belfast P/F, Cherryvale P/F, Clara Park P/F, Cliftonville P/F, Dixon P/F, Falls Park, Grove P/F, King George V P/F, Loughside P/F, Mallusk P/F, Musgrave Park, Orangefield P/F, Ormeau P/F, Shore Road P/F, Strangford P/F,

² Where the Council owns a building which is either leased or managed then the EQIA will only consider physical access and not opening hours or closure days.

Suffolk P/F, Victoria Park, Wedderburn Park, Woodvale Park, Woodlands P/F, Blanchflower Stadium, City of Belfast Golf Course);

- **Belfast Castle**;
- **Malone House**;
- **Consumer Advice Centre**;
- **Port Health Office**;
- **Buildings within Parks & Open Spaces** (Botanic Palm House and Tropical Ravine, Service Yards & Bothys, Bandstands, Public Conveniences, Cave Hill Adventurous Playground and Nature Study Centre);
- **Cemeteries** (City, Dundonald, Roselawn)³;
- **Mortuary**;
- **Crematorium**;
- **Belfast Zoo**;
- **Civic Amenity Sites** (Agnes Street, Boucher Road, Charlotte Street, Clara Street, Clifton Park Avenue, Garron Crescent, Kennedy Way, Medway Street, Palmerston Road, Park Road, Primrose Street, Seapark Drive, Springfield Avenue);
- **Public Conveniences**;
- **Workshops and Offices**;
- **Managed / Leased Sites** (Mary Peters Track, Tommy Patton Memorial Park, Ulidia Playing Fields, Shore Road Playing Fields, Ormeau Golf Club, Shaftesbury Centre, Grosvenor Centre, Templemore, First Stop Shop, Belfast Welcome Centre).

3.2 Relevant Legislation

- 3.2.1** Other than the equality and good relations duties placed on the Council under the existing anti-discrimination legislation and **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**, the following specific pieces of legislation are also of particular relevance to the Access Policy:
- 3.2.2** Councils are statutory corporations and as such can only do what they are entitled to do by statute directly or by implication. The **Local Government Act (NI) 1972** outlines the principal functions of Councils and Section 95(1) of the Act provides that a Council may provide and maintain offices, halls or other buildings to be used for the purposes of transacting the business of the Council or for public meetings, assemblies or entertainments.
- 3.2.3** The enabling legislation covering the buildings referred to in this EQIA does not make reference to access but permits Councils to provide and maintain facilities for the provision of its functions to the public.
- 3.2.4** **Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 (DDA)** places the following duties on service providers:

³ Other cemeteries which are no longer in use and do not include functioning buildings (e.g. Friar's Bush, Balmoral) have not been included in this EQIA.

- since December 1996, it has been unlawful for service providers to refuse to serve a disabled person, offer a lower standard of service or provide a service on worse terms to a disabled person for a reason related to their disability.
- the duties of landlords and others connected with the selling, letting and managing of premises were also introduced in December 1996. Since then it has been unlawful to treat disabled people less favourably for a reason related to their disability; there is no equivalent duty to make reasonable adjustments in relation to those premises.
- since October 1999, service providers have had to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people in the way they provide their services (i.e. changing practices, policies and procedures; providing auxiliary aids and services; overcoming a physical feature by providing services by reasonable alternative methods).
- from 1 October 2004, service providers will have duties in respect of overcoming a physical feature by removing or altering it or providing a reasonable means of avoiding it.

3.2.5 The **Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order 1986** requires each district Council to secure the provision of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities and for that purpose may, either alone or together with another District Council or any other person –

- (a) establish, maintain and manage any such facilities;
- (b) organise any such activities;
- (c) assist, by financial contributions or otherwise, any person to establish, maintain and manage any such facilities or to organize any such activities;
- (d) provide, or assist by financial contribution or otherwise in the provision of, leaders for such activities; and
- (e) defray or contribute towards the expenses of any persons taking part in any such activities.

4.0 Consideration of Available Data and Research

The following sources of information have been taken into consideration:-

4.1 The City Equality Profile

(Refer to 2.4)

4.2 The Council's Database of Consultee Groups

The Database covers representatives drawn from all nine equality dimensions.

4.3 Baseline Data

Each year the Council prepares a 'Baseline Profile' of Belfast, bringing together statistical information from a variety of sources. In terms of Section 75 obligations, the following summary statistics are of particular note:

- Belfast City covers 11,489 hectares and has a resident population of 277,391.
- Over the past four decades the resident population has been declining, with a 5% decline since 1991. Belfast's population now represents just over 16% of the total Northern Ireland population, compared to 23% in 1971.
- Although minority ethnic groups constitute less than 1.37% of the total Belfast population, the City contains a higher proportion of members of ethnic minority groups than Northern Ireland as a whole. For example, it is estimated that 40% of the NI Chinese community, 25% - 34% of the Pakistani community and 10% of the Indian community live in Belfast.
- Belfast has a higher proportion of households with no earners and a lower proportion of two income households compared with the rest of Northern Ireland;
- 28% of the population is under 15 years of age and more than 15% is over the age of 65;
- Belfast contains nine of the top ten most deprived wards in Northern Ireland in terms of multiple deprivation;
- 12 of Belfast's 51 wards account for 40% of unemployment in the City;
- According to a survey conducted by Belfast City Council the majority of Belfast residents feel that the worst things about living in the City are the levels of violence and sectarianism;
- According to the Noble Report the worst ten wards in terms of poor health are all in Belfast.
- Belfast is one of four Council areas in Northern Ireland which have a higher percentage of reported racist incidents than the percentage of the minority population resident in the area and Belfast records the highest number of racist incidents.
- According to PSNI statistics the incidence of recorded racist crimes in the City decreased from 260 in 2000/01 to 185 in 2001/02.

4.4 Corporate Complaints

The Council's corporate complaints database was analysed from April 1998 to June 2002 to identify any complaints related to disabled access or facilities. During this period, 4,865 complaints were received by the Council. A total of 10 complaints (0.2%) dealing with disabled access or facilities was recorded:

- 2 complaints concerned disabled facilities in two leisure centres;
- 5 related to disabled access in the Waterfront Hall;
- 2 concerned disabled access and facilities in St. Georges Market;
- 1 related to facilities associated with an organised event.

4.5 Accident Reports

Accident reports from the seven core Council departments (Chief Executive's, Legal Services, Corporate Services, Health & Environmental Services, Client Services, Contract Services and Development) were considered from January 1999 to December 2001, broken down by type of accident, gender (male/female), age (adult/minor) and person involved (employee/public). The total number of accidents involving the Chief Executive's Office (5), Development (2) and Legal Services (0) were deemed to be too small to warrant further analysis. An analysis of the reports from the remaining four departments is presented below:

4.5.1 Corporate Services

A total of 36 reports were recorded, involving 23 employees and 13 members of the public, and relating to 16 men and 20 women, of whom 33 were adults and 3 were minors. The accidents involved a range of incidents including slipping/tripping (14), injured while lifting (5) and striking / being struck by an object or vehicle (11).

4.5.2 Health & Environmental Services

Twenty four reports, all from employees, of whom 7 were recorded as female and 6 as involving minors. Incidents involved slipping/tripping (7), and striking / being struck by an object or vehicle (6).

4.5.3 Client Services

A total of 576 reports, 104 from employees and 472 from the public. 285 reports involved females, 291 males, with 285 relating to minors and 291 relating to adults. The incidents related primarily to tripping (248) and striking / being struck by a vehicle or object (205).

4.5.4 Contract Services

A total of 3,031 reports over the three year period, involving 749 employees and 2,282 members of the public. 945 accidents involved women and 2086 involved men, with 1323 concerning minors and 2708 adults. Once more, most accidents involved tripping or slipping, 1,096, with a further 1,354 relating to being struck or striking an object or vehicle. 144 concerned injuries sustained while lifting or carrying.

4.6 Public Consultation Surveys: 1999 and 2001

In 1999 and again in 2001, the Council commissioned public consultation exercises involving 1,500 citizens of Belfast. These face-to-face interview surveys, carried out in the respondent's home, were designed to obtain views about:

- How well the Council performs as an organisation;
- The importance of and levels of satisfaction with services provided;
- What does, or could, make Belfast a better place to live.

4.6.1 Both survey samples were structured by age, gender, religion, social class and electoral ward and were followed up by discussions with residents' groups.

4.6.2 The 1999 survey revealed that 68% of respondents sampled were satisfied with the work of the Council but only 11% had seen the Council's A-Z of Council Services and 24% said they knew 'very little' about what services the Council provides. 7 people (less than 1%) experienced language difficulties when communicating with the Council, of whom 5 expressed a preference for Chinese.

4.6.3 When asked, 'Have you, or someone you were with, ever had any difficulty in obtaining access to the Council's facilities?', 2% (29 people) said yes. The buildings where more than two cases of access problems were reported included: the City Hall (7), leisure centres (4) and civic amenity centres (7), although only one case at each location came from a person with a disability.

4.6.4 Further to the survey, eight focus groups, partly selected on the basis of the introduction of Section 75, were set up. Four groups were based on electoral areas while the other four looked at issues that were important from the perspective of:

- People with a disability
- People from different ethnic minority backgrounds
- Gay / Lesbian People
- Young People

4.6.5 The focus group made up of people with a disability rated the Council's public conveniences very poorly because of access problems, level of provision and

a facilities. This group highlighted the need for the Council to give people with disability a 'voice' in the decision-making process. Other issues raised, which are not under the responsibility of the Council, included uneven pavements, illegal use of disabled parking spaces, pedestrianisation limiting disabled access and unwarranted issuing of orange disability badges.

4.6.6 No specific access issues emerged from the other groups, although the group composed of those from different ethnic minority backgrounds did feel that Sunday closing restricted tourism potential and argued that shops, restaurants and other amenities should operate as normal on Sunday.

4.6.7 Of the focus groups based on electoral areas, only the Balmoral group raised a concern with access, arguing that the Council should provide more open access to the planning process to afford an opportunity to comment on or object to new developments.

4.6.8 In 2001, the Council conducted its second consultation exercise with 1,523 residents of Belfast, followed by ten focus groups. Overall satisfaction with the Council increased to 71% since 1999.

4.6.9 When asked the same question, 'Have you, or someone you were with, ever had any difficulty in obtaining access to the Council's facilities?', 5% said yes, an increase of 3% from 1999. In 24% of these cases the difficulty had been experienced at civic amenity sites, in 22% it had been in relation to public toilets and 16% involved either leisure centres or parks and open spaces.

4.6.10 Among the difficulties experienced were either that the facility was closed during opening hours, 12%, or that toilets were locked, 12%. In this survey 2% said they had experienced difficulty in communicating with the Council because English was not their preferred or first language and 1% because of a disability.

4.6.11 On this occasion, the focus groups were deliberately structured with the Section 75 categories in mind (i.e. ethnicity, disability, older people, younger people, people with dependants and sexual orientation).

4.6.12 People from different ethnic minority backgrounds felt that the Council should provide more accessible information on its services (i.e. in alternative formats) and that it should consult directly with people from ethnic minority groups to establish particular needs. The only access issue raised by participants in the disability group was the scarcity of public toilets. Other concerns raised in relation to access were from the South Belfast focus group where participants felt the Council was generally inaccessible; the North Belfast group where it was argued that facilities for young people in the City were inadequate and the Young People focus group where the general lack of facilities for young people in the City was highlighted.

4.7 Access Focus Group Meeting 17/1/2002

In January 2002 the Council hosted a focus group comprising 23 representatives from various consultee groups and Council staff. These included groups not only relating to disability but also ethnic minorities, age, trade unions, and local communities.

4.7.1 The main points to emerge from the meeting were:

- The Council should be proactive in sharing its good practice with others;
- Capacity / awareness training for staff was seen as pivotal to the success of meeting DDA 2004 Access obligations;
- Consultations with the various Section 75 groups and especially those with learning or physical disabilities should continue;
- Access to public toilets and changing facilities should be highlighted as main priorities;
- The Council should seek clarity on the DDA Code of Practice;
- The Council should encourage the use of pictorial signage and make available 'safe areas' for use in a emergency evacuation procedure;
- Alarms and evacuation procedures should be appropriate to the needs of all, irrespective of disability;
- Communication both within the Council and with external users of Council facilities should be effective, with the use of text phones to be a priority
- All Council employees involved in managing outdoor events should have access to a contact list of names and phone numbers of groups / individuals willing to give advice on the needs of the disabled.
- There should be staff training to help assist customers who are blind or visually impaired, or who have mobility difficulties
- Front-line staff should be trained in sign language skills
- Strobe or flashing fire alarms should be installed
- Customer feedback mechanisms should include questions about access for disabled customers
- A courtesy wheelchair should be made available
- Proper direction signs should be put in place to help people find their way around easily. Letters should be in colour contrast to the background and at least 20 mm
- Information should be available in large print, Braille, audiocassette and computer disk format. Information should also be available on video with subtitles and if possible with sign language

4.8 Council Working Groups (Disability Access; Waterfront Hall Disability)

In November 2000, the Council established the Disability Access Group (DAG) to ensure a corporate approach to its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act's (DDA) 2004 requirements (see above) and in particular, in terms of provision of services, to overcome a physical feature by removing or altering it or providing a reasonable means of avoiding it.

4.8.1 This Group reported to the Property Steering Group through the Property Maintenance Group and was made up of officers from Civic Buildings and

Property Care, Building Control, Capital Works, the Waterfront Hall, Human Resources and the Equality Officer. Attached to the Group was a Technical Sub-Group who reported to the Property Maintenance Group

- 4.8.2** The Group met on 12 occasions (14/11/00, 5/4/01, 10/5/01, 14/6/01, 19/7/01, 23/8/01, 27/9/01, 24/10/01, 22/11/01, 20/12/01, 14/1/02, 19/2/02).
- 4.8.3** In January 2002 the Equality Scheme Steering Group (since renamed the Good Relations Working Group) decided that because the focus of the DAG had changed and it was now dealing with much broader equality issues, its terms of reference should be expanded and its composition reviewed. Following from this decision the Group was renamed the 'DDA Group' and its membership was widened to include representation from all Departments. It now reports to both the Property Maintenance Group and the Good Relations Working Group.
- 4.8.4** The Group established its terms of reference, i.e. to devise a strategy and an implementation plan, primarily to ensure that the Council would be DDA compliant by 01/10/04 and to report regularly to COMT and Committee. The Group has met on nine occasions (25/3/02, 15/4/02, 14/5/02, 27/6/02, 20/8/02, 26/9/02, 4/11/02, 18/12/02, 30/01/03) and has continued to progress its 'DDA 2004 Access Audit Programme'. This programme covers over 150 buildings.

4.9 Accessibility Programme of Works

In compliance 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 economic limitations, all physical obstacles to access. Where feasible this work will be carried out by October 2004 with a commitment to having all properties audited and programmed for work by this date. This work is overseen by the Corporate Services Department.

4.9.1 The following checklist gives a summary position on the approach of Belfast City Council to the carrying out of accessibility audits for its properties.

Car Parking	Vertical Circulation
Parking Spaces	Lifts
Drop-off Zones	Ramps
Signage	Stairs
Approaches	Toilet Facilities
Information	Cubicle Layout
Kerbs	Doors
Pavement Surfaces	Alarms
Street Furniture	
	Egress
Entrance & Access to Buildings	Management Procedures
Steps	Refuge Areas
Ramps	Vertical Escape Routes
Handrails	Horizontal Escape Routes
Surfaces	Fixtures & Fittings
Entrance Doors	Switches & Controls
Reception Areas & Entrance Lobbies	Handles
Reception Counters	Taps
Information & Staffing	Telephone – Shelving
Signage	Vending Machines etc
Lighting	Furniture
Seating	Special Areas
Horizontal Circulation	Meeting Rooms
Corridors	Auditoria
Lighting	Exhibition/Display Areas
Tonal Contrast	Offices
Finishes	Staff Areas
Signage	Dining Areas
Doors	Changing Areas
	Sports Areas

4.9.2 To date, disability access audits have been carried out on all Leisure Centres, the Waterfront Hall, Belfast Castle, Malone House the City Hall and other primary buildings within the Council portfolio. This is a rolling programme of work and the attached Access Programme database provides detail of audit dates for all Council properties.

4.9.3 The Waterfront Hall report was presented to the Hall's Access and Facility Working Group on August 12th 2002 and included representatives from Shop Mobility, the Blind Centre for NI, the British Deaf Association, Adapt Fund for NI, the Arts Council and South and East Belfast Trust.

4.9.4 The Council will also audit Open Spaces for which it has responsibility. The Council is carrying out pilot audits using the 'BT Countryside for All – Standards and Guidelines' template.

4.10 Service Reviews

The Council is mid-way through a five-year programme of service reviews, using a methodology developed by the Council and based on best practice across the UK. These reviews address the 5 Cs of Best Value (challenge; consult; compare; compete; collaborate).

4.10.1 Performance Improvement Plans have been adopted for both Outdoor and Indoor Leisure. For Indoor Leisure, the Plan commits to '*continually measure performance data and the management processes against appropriate benchmarking partners*'. Benchmarking has taken place with 19 other Councils. For Outdoor Leisure, the plan commits to further benchmark with Councils already mentioned, province-wide and in the UK.

4.10.2 Relevant information forthcoming from these reviews includes the following:

- *Consumer Advice Centre* states consideration has been given to making the Centre accessible to disabled people;
- *Cemeteries & Crematorium* states that consideration has been given to ensuring the buildings are accessible to disabled people;
- *Belfast Zoo* mentions free access for people with disabilities and their helpers, but not specifically about ensuring access for disabled people (under review);
- *Indoor Leisure* has undertaken a Disability Access Audit.
- Significant annual funding for access has been set aside in the Council's budget.

4.10.3 For the Waterfront Hall, a Best Value consultation exercise was completed in Spring 2002. In addition, there is a Waterfront Hall Disabled Working Group that consults regularly with the management of the Waterfront Hall on relevant issues.

4.11 Opening Hours, Closure Days and other Access Data

(Unless otherwise stated, all buildings and associated facilities are closed to the public on the following Bank and Public Holidays: New Year's Day, St Patrick's Day, Easter Monday, Easter Tuesday, May Day, May Bank Holiday, July 12th, July 13th, August Bank Holiday, December 25th, December 26th).

4.11.1 Leisure Centres, Recreation Centres & Swimming Pools
(Andersonstown, Whiterock, Olympia, Beechmount, Falls, Shankill, Ballysillan, Loughside, Grove, Maysfield, Ozone/Tennis Arena/Laserquest, Avoniel, Ballymacarrett)

Core opening hours for Leisure Centres are as follows:

	Tier 1 and Tier 2 ⁴	Tier 3		
		Belfast Indoor Tennis Arena and Ozone Complex	Ballymacarret	Loughside
Monday	10.00am – 10.00pm	9.00am – 10.00pm	12.00am-10.00pm	9.00am - 10.00pm
Tuesday	10am – 10.00pm	9.00am – 10.00pm	12.00am-10.00pm	9.00am - 10.00pm
Wednesday	10am – 10.00pm	9.00am – 10.00pm	12.00am-10.00pm	9.00am - 10.00pm
Thursday	10am – 10.00pm	9.00am – 10.00pm	9.00am-8.00pm	9.00am - 8.00pm
Friday	10am – 10.00pm	9.00am – 10.00pm	1.00pm – 5.00pm	9.00am – 4.00pm
Saturday	10am – 4.00pm	9.00am – 10.00pm	9.00am – 4.00pm	9.00am – 4.30pm
Sunday	10am – 4.00pm	10.00am – 6.00pm	Closed	Closed

Leisure Centres remain open to the public 364 days a year except where operational and/or economic reasons determine otherwise. Opening times may vary due to local demand.

4.11.2 Community Centres (Ardoyne, Concorde, Dee Street, Divis, Donegall Pass, Duncairn; Finaghy, Glen Road, Hammer, Highfield, Horn Drive, Inverary, Knocknagoney, Ligoniel, Markets, Morton, North Queen Street, Olympia, Sandy Row; Suffolk, Whiterock, Woodvale)

Council Community Centres Opening Hours.

Mon - Fri	9.00am – 5.00pm	7.00pm – 11.00pm
Saturday	Bookings Discretionary	
Sunday	Bookings Discretionary	

Playcentre Opening Hours

Mon - Fri	9.30am – 12.30pm	2.00pm – 4.00pm

4.11.3 Civic Buildings

Belfast City Hall and Cecil Ward Building Opening Hours

	City Hall & Cecil Ward Building	Other Hours
Mon - Thur	8.30am – 5.00pm	City Hall is also open for functions, committees etc. as necessary outside public access hours
Friday	8.30am – 4.30pm	
Saturday	Open to tours	
Sunday	Closed	

⁴ Tier 1 and 2 centres are Maysfield, Shankill, Avoniel, Andersonstown, Whiterock, Olympia, Ballysillan, Beechmount, & Grove

City Hall Scheduled Guided Tours

	June - Sept	Oct - May
Monday	11.00am, 2.00pm, 3.00pm	11.00am, 2.30pm
Tuesday	11.00am, 2.00pm, 3.00pm	11.00am, 2.30pm
Wednesday	11.00am, 2.00pm, 3.00pm	11.00am, 2.30pm
Thursday	11.00am, 2.00pm, 3.00pm	11.00am, 2.30pm
Friday	11.00am, 2.00pm, 3.00pm	11.00am, 2.30pm
Saturday	2.30pm	11.00am, 2.30pm
Sunday	Closed to tours	

In addition, tour group bookings are taken weekdays, evenings and weekends on request. There are no tours on Bank and Public Holidays.

Access gates to the City Hall Grounds are opened and closed in accordance with the opening hours as applied to Council parks (i.e. dawn to dusk) except that in the winter months the gates are kept open until 5.30 pm Monday to Friday.

Within these buildings the following opening hours apply to particular offices:

Dog Licensing (Cecil Ward)

Monday to Thursday	9.00am – 4.30 pm
Friday	9.00am – 4.00 pm

Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages (City Hall)

Monday to Thursday	9.30am – 4.30 pm
Friday	9.30am – 4.00 pm
Saturday (weddings only)	9.00am – 12.00am

The Registrar's Office is also open on all bank or public holidays (from 9.30am to 12 noon) for registration of deaths except Easter Tuesday, July 12th, December 25th and is open on New Year's Day or St Patrick's day only if they should fall on a Monday or Friday;

Building Control (City Hall)

Building Control Reception is open as per the standard reception hours for the City Hall.

Cemeteries Office (City Hall)

Monday to Thursday	8.30am – 5.00 pm
Friday	8.30am – 4.30 pm
Saturday (cremation papers only)	8.30am – 12.30am

The Cemeteries Office is also open on the following Bank and Public Holidays - Easter Tuesday, July 13th, December 26th and St Patrick's Day from 8.30am to 12.30pm.

4.11.4 Theatres / Halls

Waterfront Hall

Monday to Saturday	10.00am – 6.00pm(except for event evenings when open until 9.00pm)
Sunday / Bank Holidays	Closed (except for event evenings when open from 5.00pm – 9.00pm)

Ulster Hall / Group Theatre

Monday to Friday	8.30am – 4.30 pm
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Other opening hours are event driven.

4.11.5 Markets

ST GEORGE'S MARKET	
Friday	5.30am – 2.00pm
Saturday	8.00am – 2.00pm

St George's Market is also hired for approximately 30 events, exhibitions and shows during the year and when not in regular use.

SMITHFIELD MARKET	
Monday to Saturday	8.00 am – 5.30 pm

4.11.6 Pavilions associated with Playing Fields and Sports Grounds

(Alexandra Park, Ballysillan P/F, Botanic Park, Boucher Road P/F, City of Belfast P/F, Cherryvale P/F, Clara Park P/F, Cliftonville P/F, Dixon P/F, Falls Park, Grove P/F, King George V P/F, Loughside P/F, Mallusk P/F, Musgrave Park, Orangefield P/F, Ormeau P/F, Shore Road P/F, Strangford P/F, Suffolk P/F, Victoria Park, Wedderburn Park, Woodvale Park, Woodlands P/F, Blanchflower Stadium, City of Belfast Golf Course). Sports pavilions are open on request or by appointment.

4.11.7 Blanchflower, Cherryvale, Dixon Park, Inverary Park, King George V, Orangefield, (football) and Mary Peters Pavilions are open on Saturdays from 10am to 12noon and from 2pm to 4pm.

The Council's 12 Bowling Greens and associated pavilions: Ballysillan, Botanic, Falls, Grove, Inverary, Musgrave, Orangefield, Ormeau, Ravenhill, Victoria, Wedderburn & Woodvale are open between April and September from 11.00 am – 9.00 pm.

City of Belfast Golf Course

WINTER	
Monday – Sunday	9.00am – 4.30pm
SUMMER	
Monday – Sunday	8.00am – 8.30pm

Times are subject to variation due to weather/lighting conditions.

4.11.8 Belfast Castle

Monday to Saturday	9.00am – 10.30pm
Sunday	9.00am – 6.00pm

The Castle will open outside these hours for business purposes.

4.11.9 Malone House

Monday to Saturday	9.00am – 6.00pm
Sunday	10.00am – 5pm

Malone House will open outside these hours for business purposes.

4.11.10 Consumer Advice Centre

Monday & Tuesday	9.30 am – 4.30 pm
Wednesday	9.30 am – 2.00 pm
Thursday	9.30am – 2.00pm
Friday	9.30am – 4.15pm

4.11.11 Port Health Office

Monday to Thursday	8.30 am – 5.00 pm
Friday	8.30am – 4.30pm

4.11.12 Buildings within Parks & Open Spaces (Botanic Palm House and Tropical Ravine, Bandstands, Public Conveniences, Cave Hill Adventure Playground and Nature Study Centre).

All Belfast parks open from dawn to dusk each day (except December 25th). The following opening times also apply to specific buildings within Parks:

- Botanical Tropical Ravine and Palm House opens from 10.00am – 5.00pm every day and evenings on demand;
- Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park & Roselawn Cemetery open from 9.00am until dusk

Cave Hill Adventurous Playground	Monday – Friday	Saturday & Sunday
April – May	2.00pm – 5.00pm	10.00am – 6.00pm
June	2.00pm – 8.00pm	10.00am – 8.00pm
July - August	10.00am – 8.00pm	10.00am – 8.00pm
September	2.00pm – 7.30pm	10.00am – 7.30pm
October		11.00am – 4.30pm
November – December		11.00am – 3.30pm
January		11.00am – 4.00pm
February - March		11.00am – 4.30pm

- The Nature Study Centre is open Monday to Friday during school terms for educational purposes.

4.11.13 Cemeteries (City, Dundonald, Roselawn)

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Jan	8.00am – 4.00pm						10.00am – 4.00pm
Feb	8.00am – 4.00pm						10.00am – 4.00pm
Mar	8.00am – 6.00pm						10.00 – 6.00pm
Apr - Sept	8.00am – 6.00pm	8.00am – 8.00pm	8.00am – 6.00pm	8.00am – 8.00pm	8.00am – 6.00pm	8.00am – 6.00pm	10.00am – 6.00pm
Oct	8.00am – 6.00pm						10.00 – 4.00pm
Nov	8.00am – 4.00pm						10.00am – 4.00pm
Dec	8.00am – 4.00pm						10.00am – 4.00pm

Cemeteries are open on Bank holidays.

- *City, Dundonald and Roselawn Cemetery Offices*

Monday to Thursday	8.30am – 4.30pm
Friday	8.30am – 4.00pm
Saturday	8.30am – 12.30pm

The offices are open on the following public holidays; Easter Tuesday, July 13th, December 26th and St Patrick's Day 8.30am – 12.30pm.

4.11.14 City of Belfast Crematorium Office

Monday to Friday	9.00am – 4.00pm
Saturday	9.00 am – 12.30 pm
Sunday	2.00pm – 4.00pm

Variations to these hours may occur for operational reasons. This office opens on the following public holidays; Easter Tuesday, July 13th, December 26th and St Patrick's Day 8.30am – 12.30pm.

4.11.15 Mortuary Office

Monday to Thursday	9.00am – 5.00pm
Friday	8.30am – 4.30pm

4.11.16 Belfast Zoo

The zoo is open to the public every day (except December 25th).

April – September	10.00am – 6.00pm
October - March	10.00am – 3.00pm

4.11.17 Civic Amenity Sites (Agnes Street, Boucher Road, Charlotte Street, Clara Street, Clifton Park Avenue, Garron Crescent, Kennedy Way, Medway Street, Palmerston Road, Park Road, Primrose Street, Seapark Drive, Springfield Avenue)

All sites are open

	April – September	October - March
Monday – Friday	8.00am – 8.00pm	8.00am – 4.00pm
Saturday	8.00am – 5.00pm	
Sunday*	12.00 noon – 4.00pm	

*This applies only to Agnes Street, Boucher Road, Clara Street, Garron Crescent, Kennedy Way, Palmerston Street, Springfield Avenue.

Dargan Road Landfill Site

Monday to Thursday	7.30am – 4.30pm
Friday	7.30am – 4.00pm
Saturday	7.30am – 11.00am

4.11.18 Public Conveniences – General (Arthur Lane, Church Lane, Winetavern Street, Dublin Road, Hope Street, Templemore Avenue, Connswater, Clara Street, Ormeau Embankment, Agnes Street, Drumglass Park).

Monday – Saturday*	9.00am – 6.00pm
Sunday**	Closed

* Dublin Road and Hope Street 24 hours.

Arthur Lane and Church Lane are open until 9.00 pm on Thursday.

** Except Ormeau Embankment and Drumglass Park which open 9.30 am – 5.30 pm.

Nursing mothers' facilities are available in Arthur Lane, Church Lane, Winetavern Street and Agnes Street.

4.11.19 Public Conveniences – Parks and Amenities

Parks and Amenities with Public Toilet facilities

Area South/West	Area East	Area North
Botanic Gardens*	Cherryvale Playing Fields*	
Falls Park*	Orangefield Playing Fields*	
City Cemetery*	Victoria Park*	
Drumglass*	Dixon Park Playing Fields*	
Wedderburn*	Ormeau Park	
	Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park	
	Dundonald Cemetery	

Due to vandalism and anti-social behaviour public toilet facilities at sites marked * are kept closed and opened for specific occasions only.

The Provision and maintenance of public conveniences is reviewed on an ongoing basis and will be subject to an EQIA in 2003/2004.

4.11.20 Managed / Leased Sites (Mary Peters Track, Tommy Patton Memorial Park, Ulidia Playing Fields, Shore Road Playing Fields, Ormeau Golf Club, Shaftesbury Centre, Grosvenor Centre, Templemore Swimming Centre, First Stop Shop, and Belfast Welcome Centre). Opening hours and closure days are determined by the leasee.

4.12 User Surveys

The Council monitors the use of facilities and services through our Best Value Reviews. However we are now developing more effective monitoring systems to incorporate the nine equality categories. Knowledge of the uptake of services provided by the Council and the impact of policies on the different groups within the Section 75 categories will be of assistance in assessing progress towards equality of opportunity. However the following user surveys have been carried out.

4.12.1 Park User Survey 2001

The research involved four surveys:

- 716 face-to-face interviews with 716 individuals, sampled from within the 18 Belfast parks;
- 143 face-to-face interviews, sampled from within the 3 Belfast cemeteries;
- 222 in-home interviews with non-users of Cave Hill/ Belfast Castle Estate, Musgrave Park and Orangefield Park, living within a mile of each location;
- 147 in-home interviews with children who were non-users of Cave Hill/ Belfast Castle Estate, Musgrave Park and Orangefield Park.

Key findings to emerge included:

- Over half of respondents felt Belfast had adequate parks and open spaces;
- Majority travelled to parks on foot or by car and half lived less than one mile from the park;
- Visitors to parks were especially satisfied with the pathways and opening times but dissatisfied with lack of staff presence and inadequate toilet facilities;
- Major improvements to parks suggested were improved toilet facilities, improved playground facilities, to have park wardens, improved seating and improved security/safety;
- In cemeteries, respondents were generally satisfied with opening times, pathways and car parking but less satisfied with lack of seating and toilet facilities;
- Main reasons stated for non-use of parks were '*too many undesirables*' and they saw the park as '*unsafe*';
- Among children, the most common time for visiting playgrounds was late afternoon (3 pm – 6 pm) and also early afternoon (12 am – 3 pm) especially at weekends.

4.12.2 Belfast City Hall and Cecil Ward Building Surveys

During the year September 2001 – September 2002, 1,151 tours were organised of the City Hall, involving a total of 27,134 people. Of those who completed comment cards during the visit, the majority stated accessibility was either excellent or good.

As part of the Tour Service Review 2000 a questionnaire was issued to 600 people who were asked to comment on their access to the City Hall. 77% stated that access was very good, 18.7% said good and 3.6% 'don't know'.

Comment cards recently have been introduced in both the City Hall and the Cecil Ward Building. These ask the public to rate the accessibility of the buildings. To date, of 43 replies to the City Hall comment card, 68% rated accessibility as 'excellent', 25% 'good', 2% 'poor' and 5% did not respond. When asked to rate the accessibility of the Cecil Ward Building, 57% said 'excellent', 29% 'good', 14% 'fair' and none felt that it was poor.

4.13 Use of City Hall and Grounds

The Council operates guidelines on the assessment of requests for use of accommodation in the City Hall. This assessment is reported to the Policy and Resources Committee.

Use is granted in the following circumstances:

- To organisations based in or connected with the City celebrating their centenary;
- For events of an educational or related nature involving young people from the City including the presentation of awards by bodies such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and exhibitions of work of young people;
- To bodies with a particular connection with the Council including professional bodies related to the functions and administration of the Council;
- For events with a particular relevance to economic and tourist development within the City;
- For events such as the Remembrance Day Ceremony.

5.0 Assessment of Impact

5.1 A review of the existing data indicates that, in equality terms, access has primarily been an issue in relation to disability. The Council is already addressing access for those with a disability in its Accessibility Audits. However an assessment of the possible impacts of the Council's Access Policy in terms of the nine equality dimensions and the interaction between the dimensions was conducted and is set out below.

5.2 Religious Belief

This EQIA is not addressing the physical distribution of operational locations across Belfast but is concerned with addressing the accessibility of each of the buildings listed earlier.

5.2.1 A possible religious impact arises regarding the closure of the crematorium on Sunday. The Council will seek views during the consultation stage of this EQIA to establish whether or not the Sunday closure has any consequences for particular religions.

5.3 Political Opinion

It is not likely that the Council's Access policy will have an adverse impact in grounds of political opinion.

5.4 Racial Group

The Council is considering the possibility of introducing pictorial signage in key areas of access and egress as well as areas where health & safety would be an issue.

5.4.1 The issue raised above regarding the closure of the crematorium on Sunday may also raise indirect adverse impact on racial groups.

5.5 Age

Physical access may be an issue for older persons who have mobility difficulties but who do not have a disability for the purposes of the Disability Discrimination Act. The Council also intends to extend its access audits to cover age.

5.5.1 Use of Council facilities is open to all. However there have been on occasion, requests for specific use of facilities such as swimming pools in the Leisure Centres. Groups who have requested special use of facilities include Jigsaw, and Chest Heart and Stroke. Sympathetic consideration may be given to specific groups based upon the merits of each case and where evidence supports it. This is seen as having a positive rather than negative impact. Operation and monitoring and evaluation issues are continually being revised.

5.5.2 Use of the City Hall is granted for events of an educational or related nature however, this policy is currently under review to ensure that it is fully inclusive.

5.6 Marital Status

It is not likely that the Council's Access policy will have an adverse impact in terms of marital status. Issues of family status are addressed under the heading of Dependants.

5.7 Sexual Orientation

It is not likely that the Council's Access policy will have an adverse impact in terms of sexual orientation.

5.8 Gender

It is not likely that the Council's Access policy will have an adverse impact in terms of gender apart from interrelated issues dealt with in relation to dependants below.

5.8.1 While use of Council facilities is open to all, sympathetic consideration may be given to specific groups based upon the merits of each case and where evidence supports it. The Council operates a single sexed swimming session in Olympia Leisure Centre to accommodate women, who because of their religious belief, cannot swim in public. The single sexed swimming session is open to all women. Therefore, at certain times, Council facilities may hold activities for a particular group. This is seen as having a positive rather than negative impact.

5.9 Disability

The main focus of this EQIA is the accessibility of buildings and facilities on the grounds of disability. To this end the Council has embarked on a programme of accessibility audits for all its buildings and a programme of works arising from these audits. In addition the Council has adopted BS 8300 Code of Practice as its universal standard for the design and improvement of its buildings to meet the DDA 2004 requirements.

5.10 Dependants

Access to Council buildings and facilities to those with prams and buggies is an issue which is addressed by the Council's Access Audits. The Council is currently reviewing its policy on the provision of toilets and baby changing facilities.

5.10.1 The opening and closing hours of Council premises may raise accessibility issues for those with dependants. Knowledge and communication of opening and closing time of various facilities and buildings will be considered at the consultation stage to those with dependents. The Council will seek views at the consultation stage regarding the issues of accessibility.

5.11 Interactions between Categories

Accessibility can apply to one or more categories (e.g. women from ethnic minorities, disabled older persons) broadening of access audits beyond the disability field will ensure that the multi identity needs are identified.

6.0 Measures to Mitigate / Alternative Policies

6.1 Having considered available data and research and considered any adverse impact that might arise out of existing policies, it is proposed that the Council take the following action in respect of its policies on access to the Council's buildings and associated facilities.

- Draw up an detailed action plan
- Communicate action plan to stakeholders
- Establish liaison with other relevant EQIA teams
- The Council will broaden its Access Audits to cover all nine equality dimensions and in particular will also address issues of wayfinding (signage) and mobility (e.g. age and dependancy).
- The Council will keep under review its communication systems to advise the public of opening and closing times.
- The Council is committed to developing effective monitoring systems. Knowledge of the uptake of services provided by the Council and the impact of policies on the different Section 75 dimensions will assist us in assessing progress towards equality of opportunity. We are, within our ongoing development of monitoring systems, considering both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
- Ongoing consultation with users, staff, trade unions in relation to levels of service and operations
- BCC will continue to host the annual focus group for all stakeholders on Access issues.

7.0 Formal Consultation

7.1 During the formal consultation phase the Council consulted as widely as possible on the findings included in this equality impact assessment together with the preliminary recommendations offered above. With this in mind the Council took the following actions:

- prominent advertisements inviting the public to comment on this matter were placed in the main newspapers in Northern Ireland, in accordance with normal Council practice;
- this report was issued to all of the consultees listed in the Council's Equality Scheme and to members of the public on request;
- a copy of this report was posted on the Council's website;
- individual consultation meetings were arranged with representatives of particular interest groups;
- consultation meetings for the general public were arranged at suitable, accessible venues in the city;
- publicity material was available at each of the Council's operational locations;
- the report was made available, on request, in alternative formats including Braille, disk and audiocassette and in minority languages for those who are not fluent in English.

7.2 The arrangements for consultation were co-ordinated by the Equality Officer.

7.3 The results of the consultation process has been included in a matrix format in Appendix 1.

8.0 PUBLICATION

8.1 The outcomes of this EQIA will be published in the press and results will also be posted on the Council's website. In addition all consultees and respondents to the consultation process will be circulated a copy of the report. Copies of the final report will be made available on request in other formats (including Braille, Disc, and audio cassette and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English).

