

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Screen Annual Progress Report 2006 – 2007

**Report on the implementation of the equality and good relations
duties under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998**

Name of public authority

Strategic Investment Board Limited (SIB)

Equality Officer

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Executive Summary

- What were the key policy/service developments made by the authority during this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations?

The SIB Equality Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission in November 2005 and 2006-07 was therefore the first full year of implementation. The main focus of activities was –

- the screening of the 48 existing policies;
- the development of ISNI 2;
- reviewing the arrangements for providing documents in alternative formats;
- reviewing the arrangements for advertising in the press;
- staff training.

The screening of existing policies began in December 2005 and the Stage 1 consultation report was circulated in January 2006. The comments received were taken into account and a Stage 2 report was issued for consultation in September 2006. The final screening report was published in June 2007 and work has now commenced on the EQIA of the Equal Opportunities Policy.

SIB considers that its greatest contribution to the promotion of equality of opportunity can be made through the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland. The strategy sets out priorities for investment in public sector infrastructure over a 10 year period. The first ISNI – covering the period 2005-2015 – was published in December 2005. Although equality implications were considered during the development of the first ISNI, a full EQIA was not carried out as SIB did not have an approved Equality Scheme at that time. Later this year, the Executive will set a renewed course for the Investment Strategy reflecting its priorities for the period 2008-18 (ISNI 2). SIB has therefore given careful consideration to the best method of taking full account of equality implications during the development of ISNI 2 and has decided to treat it as a developing policy for the purposes of the Equality Scheme. A screening process is currently under way with full consultation and it is anticipated that an EQIA will be carried out later this year.

In line with the commitments in the Equality Scheme (Sections 7.3 and 7.5), reviews were undertaken of the arrangements for providing information in alternative formats and arrangement for advertising in the press; the findings were published on the SIB website.

A refresher training course for all staff was provided in November 2006.

- What are the main initiatives planned in the coming year to ensure the authority improves outcomes in terms of equality of opportunity and good relations for individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75?

In the coming year, SIB will focus on –

- the screening and EQIA of ISNI 2;
- the EQIA of the Equal Opportunities Policy;
- reviewing the systems for monitoring the equality impacts of policies and updating them as necessary;
- providing refresher training for officers and awareness training for new employees;
- reviewing all policies against the new disability duties.

Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

- Outline evidence of progress made in developing and meeting equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans during 2006-07.

The SIB Equality Scheme includes a commitment to integrating objectives and targets relating to the statutory equality duties into the 3 year corporate plan and the annual business plan as appropriate (Section 3.5). The current business plan includes specific references to Section 75 duties. There is a specific business target to implement the approved Equality Scheme.

It is envisaged that consultation, impact assessments and monitoring will assist SIB to identify more comprehensive targets in future years.

Section 2: Screening

- Provide an update of new/proposed/revised policies screened during the year.

Existing policies

The SIB Equality Scheme was approved in November 2005 and work commenced immediately on a systematic review of all existing policies to determine whether there were any equality of opportunity implications. The screening process was carried out in two stages –

Stage 1 – A report was circulated for consultation in January 2006 setting out all current policies and those being developed. Consultees were invited to comment on whether all policies had been identified, how they might affect the groups being consulted in terms of equality of opportunity and the factors to be used to determine and prioritise equality impact assessments. By the end of March 2006, comments had been received from six organisations.

Stage 2 – A second report, which had been prepared taking into account the comments made during the Stage 1 consultation, was circulated in September 2006. This report set out the results of applying the screening criteria to the policies, preliminary conclusions on the policies to be subjected to equality impact assessment and the proposed timetable for these assessments. Consultees were invited to comment on the findings of the screening process, the methodology for prioritisation of equality impact assessments and the timetable for assessments. Comments were received from three organisations.

Final report – The Stage 2 report set out the preliminary conclusions on the policies to be subjected to equality impact assessment. At that stage it was proposed that two policies should be subjected to the full EQIA process. However, following further discussion with the OFMDFM, SIB concluded that the preliminary finding of the screening process should be revised to acknowledge that SIB has no decision making ability in respect of the selection of supported projects and that it would therefore be inappropriate for SIB to conduct an EQIA of this policy. The final screening report was therefore published in June 2007 specifying that an EQIA of the Equal Opportunities Policy would be carried out in 2007-08.

New policies

SIB considers that its greatest contribution to the promotion of equality of opportunity can be made through the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland. The strategy sets out priorities for investment in public sector infrastructure over a 10 year period. The first ISNI – covering the period 2005-2015 – was published in December 2005. Although equality implications were considered during the development of the first ISNI, a full EQIA was not carried out as SIB did not have an approved Equality Scheme at that time. Later this year, the Executive will set a renewed

course for the Investment Strategy reflecting its priorities for the period 2008-18 (ISNI 2).

During 2006-07 SIB therefore gave careful consideration to the best method of taking full account of equality implications during the development of ISNI 2 and decided to treat it as a developing policy for the purposes of the Equality Scheme. A screening process is currently under way with full consultation and it is anticipated that an EQIA will be carried out and completed during 2007-08.

Section 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- Provide an update of policies subject to EQIA during 2006/07, stage 7 EQIA monitoring activities & an indicative EQIA timetable for 2007-08.

The screening of current policies was completed in June 2007 and the first EQIA is therefore scheduled to commence in September 2007. The only new policy under development in 2006-07 was ISNI 2 which is currently being screened. No EQIA therefore took place in 2006-07.

2007-08 EQIA Time-table

Title of EQIAs due to be commenced during April 2007 – March 2008	Existing or New policy?	Please indicate expected timescale of Decision Making stage i.e. Stage 6
ISNI 2	New	December 2007
Equal Opportunities Policy	Existing	March 2008

- Where the EQIA timetable for 2006/07 (as detailed in the previous annual S75 progress report to the Commission) has not been met, please provide details of the factors responsible for delay and details of the timetable for re-scheduling the EQIA/s in question.

The EQIA timetable was agreed in June 2007 and it is expected that it will be completed on schedule.

Section 4: Training

- Outline training provision during the year associated with the Section 75 Duties/Equality Scheme requirements including types of training provision, numbers attending, and conclusions from any training evaluations.

The SIB Equality Scheme includes a commitment to developing an effective training programme for all staff (Section 6.1) in order to –

- raise awareness of current anti-discrimination legislation and the statutory equality duties; and
- provide those employees involved in implementing various aspects of the Equality Scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively.

Initial awareness training was provided for all staff in November 2003 and refresher training and awareness training for new employees is provided on an annual basis. The latest course in November 2006, which was attended by all staff, included training on the new disability duties as well as an update on equal opportunities legislation and progress on implementing the Equality Scheme.

SIB has a small workforce and so it has been possible to include all staff in all training sessions. The training has increased awareness of the statutory equality duties and has provided an opportunity for staff to discuss the significance of equality of opportunity in the work carried out by SIB.

Section 5: Communication

- Outline how the authority communicated progress on delivery of the statutory duties during the year and evidence of the impact/success of such activities.

There are three specific measures set out in the SIB Equality Scheme which relate to the communication of progress on the delivery of the statutory equality duties –

- monthly progress reports to the Board (as part of the standard progress report on business objectives) on achievements against the objectives and targets relating to Section 75 duties which have been integrated into the corporate plan and the annual business plan (Section 3.5);
- review of targets relating to Section 75 duties included in the personal performance plans of all staff directly engaged in this work (Section 3.6) – this was carried out as part of the annual performance review on 1 April 2007;
- annual review of progress towards implementing the arrangements in the Equality Scheme (Section 3.7) – the findings of this review were reflected in the annual progress report to the Equality Commission submitted in August 2006. This report was also made available on the SIB website and drawn to the attention of all staff.

Section 6: Data Collection & Analysis

- Outline any systems that were established during the year to supplement available statistical and qualitative research.
- Outline any research undertaken/commissioned to obtain information on the needs and experiences of individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75.

The main focus of activity in 2006-07 was the screening of current policies. This entailed extensive consultation with organisations with an interest in the work of SIB, which provided information on the needs and experiences of people in the nine Section 75 categories. The current consultation on ISNI 2 will extend SIB's understanding of the perceived equality implications of the investment strategy. Particular consideration will be given during the coming year as to how the equality implications of ISNI 2 can best be monitored.

With regard to employees, SIB has extended the equal opportunities monitoring form issued with application forms for vacant posts in order to collect data on more of the Section 75 categories. Consideration is currently being given to collecting more information on current employees through a voluntary questionnaire.

Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

- Detail any initiatives/steps taken during the year to improve access to services including provision of information in accessible formats.

Access to information

In line with the commitment in the SIB Equality Scheme (Section 7.3), a review was undertaken during 2006-07 of the arrangements for providing information in alternative formats. The conclusions of the review were that –

1. Adequate arrangements are in place to provide documents in alternative formats on request.
2. No such requests have been received to date and there is no reason to believe that the demand will increase significantly.

In line with the Equality Scheme, the findings of the review were communicated to appropriate groups and the report was made available on the SIB website.

In addition, in accordance with Section 7.5 of the Equality Scheme, a review was undertaken of the arrangements for disseminating information through the media, including 'mainstream' newspapers and publications associated with Section 75 categories. The review concluded that the arrangements for the dissemination of information through the press are adequate. SIB will continue to include a question on publications in all questionnaires and will update the list of consultees in the Equality Scheme as and when appropriate. This report was also made available on the SIB website.

Access to services

As SIB does not provide services directly to the public, the key issues relate to the general availability of information.

In order to promote public access, SIB makes a considerable amount of information available on its website, including general information about SIB itself and the projects it supports and details of the SIB Publication Scheme. The website is available in a text only version to assist those with visual impairment. The Publication Scheme includes a commitment to providing information in alternative accessible formats on request.

Section 8: Complaints

- Identify the number of Section 75 related complaints:
 - received by the authority;
 - resolved by the authority (including how this achieved);
 - which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;
 - which were referred to the Equality Commission.

SIB has developed a procedure for dealing with Section 75 complaints but no complaints have been received to date.

Section 9: Consultation and Engagement

- Provide details of the measures taken to enhance the level of engagement with individuals and representative groups during the year.

During 2006-07, SIB consulted and engaged with representative groups in relation to Stage 2 of the screening of current policies. The responses received indicated a high level of interest in the work of SIB on the part of several organisations and SIB took the comments on board before finalising the screening report in June 2007. SIB decided to conduct the screening process in two stages to ensure a high level of engagement with interested groups and further dialogue will be encouraged during the consultation on ISNI 2.

Section 10: The Good Relations Duty

Provide details of additional steps taken to implement or progress the good relations duty during the year. Please indicate any findings or expected outcomes from this work.

In general, SIB has taken forward the 'good relations' duty alongside the requirement to promote equality of opportunity. All awareness training includes information on the duty to promote good relations and, in particular, references to "A Shared Future" and the type of initiatives which are being taken forward by Government Departments.

Any opportunities to promote good relations will be identified and considered as they arise.

Section 11: Additional Comments

- Please provide any additional information/comments

None.