



# EQUALITY ACTION PLAN

2026-2030



# INTRODUCTION

**This Equality Action Plan sets out the Council's commitments to promoting equality of opportunity, valuing diversity, and ensuring inclusion for everyone who lives, works, visits, or engages with our services.**

It reflects our statutory responsibilities under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and demonstrates our commitment to creating a Borough where all individuals feel respected, represented, and able to participate fully in civic and community life.

The actions contained in this Plan outline a clear programme of work for the coming years. They build on the progress already made by the Council through its Equality Scheme, inclusive policies, accessibility initiatives and ongoing partnership with local communities and stakeholders. The Plan also reflects our ambition to be a modern, forward looking, people-centric organisation—one that embraces innovation, champions fairness, and recognises the diverse contributions of all residents.



# LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONTEXT

The Council operates within a strong legal framework designed to advance equality and human rights. The principal legislative drivers include:

- **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**, which places a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across nine equality categories, and to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group.
- **The Disability Discrimination Act 1995** and the **Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006**, which require public authorities to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.
- **The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016**, placing a duty on public authorities to consider rural needs in the development and delivery of policies and services.

- Additional policy drivers, including the Council's **Corporate Plan, Community Plan**, and commitments relating to accessibility, inclusive design, good relations, safeguarding, wellbeing and responsible employment.

This Equality Action Plan sits alongside the Council's Equality Scheme, which sets out how we fulfil our statutory equality duties. The Action Plan provides a practical roadmap to deliver on those commitments through targeted, measurable actions.



# DEVELOPMENT OF THE EQUALITY ACTION PLAN

**The Equality Action Plan has been developed through a broad process of research, engagement and internal reflection. In preparing the Plan, the Council considered a range of information, feedback and good-practice guidance to ensure that the actions are relevant, achievable and aligned with our overall responsibilities.**

This work included benchmarking with other Councils, reviewing equality-related evidence, listening to views shared through various engagement activities, and working with Elected Members, and staff across Council services to identify priority areas for improvement. The Council also drew on recognised guidance and local insights to ensure the Plan reflects current needs and supports a consistent approach to promoting fairness and inclusion.

The Equality Action Plan aligns with the Council's values and the developing "We See You" equality, diversity and inclusion identity. It reinforces our commitment to creating a Council that is open, welcoming and fair for everyone, and to ensuring that equality considerations remain a core part of how we plan, design and deliver our services.



# OVERVIEW OF PRIORITY AREAS

The Equality Action Plan is structured around six key priority themes, each supporting an inclusive, fair and responsive Council:

## **PRIORITY 1: INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICES**

Ensuring that all services—digital, physical and face to face—are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of diverse users. This includes improvements in accessibility, communications, inclusive design, play, events, facilities and service delivery.

## **PRIORITY 2: PARTICIPATION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PROMOTING GOOD RELATIONS**

Strengthening relationships with communities, increasing opportunities for participation, and promoting inclusion through events, campaigns, consultation, awareness raising and safe spaces to engage.

## **PRIORITY 3: WORKFORCE EQUALITY AND INCLUSION**

Ensuring the Council is an inclusive employer where diversity and dignity are recognised and valued. This includes EDI policies, staff networks, accreditations, wellbeing initiatives, diversity data, and commitments to a respectful and safe workplace culture. We aspire to be an employer of choice.

## **PRIORITY 4: STRENGTHENING EQUALITY GOVERNANCE**

Embedding equality in decision making structures, ensuring effective accountability and transparency, and supporting compliance with statutory obligations. This includes governance structures, training, screening processes, reporting, and the development of ethical and inclusive approaches to emerging areas such as artificial intelligence.

## **PRIORITY 5: REDUCING HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND PROMOTING INCLUSIVE WELLBEING**

Addressing health inequalities by improving accessibility of leisure and wellbeing services, supporting breastfeeding, promoting active ageing, enhancing staff training, and collaborating with local partners to advance inclusive health outcomes.

## **PRIORITY 6: INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

Promoting fair access to employment and skills development both within the Council and across the Borough. This includes inclusive recruitment, employability support for underrepresented groups, entrepreneurship initiatives, and partnership programmes that widen economic participation.

Together, these priorities form a comprehensive programme of work aimed at reducing inequalities, promoting participation, and building an inclusive and equitable Borough where everyone can thrive.

# MONITORING, REPORTING AND GOVERNANCE

Delivery of this Action Plan will be overseen by the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) governance framework, ensuring clear accountability across all departments. Progress will be:

- Monitored quarterly through the EDI Staff Operational Group
- Reported to and steered bi-annually by the EDI Elected Member Working Group
- Reported annually to the Corporate Leadership Team
- Published in line with our Equality Scheme commitments
- Submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland as required
- Informed by ongoing engagement with communities, staff and stakeholders

The Plan is intended as a living document and may be updated to reflect new needs, emerging priorities, or statutory guidance.



## CONTACT INFORMATION

If you require this document in an alternative format or would like more information about the Equality Action Plan, please contact:

### Accessibility & Inclusion Officer

Antrim Civic Centre  
50 Stiles Way Antrim  
BT41 2UB

E. [Accessibility@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk](mailto:Accessibility@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk)

Alternative formats available on request, including braille, audio, large print, Easy Read, and translations.

# PRIORITY 1: INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

Table 1: The action plan is set out under the following headings: action, responsibility lead, timescale, outcomes, measures and targets.

Ref	Action	Section 75 Category	Responsibility Lead	Timescale	Outcomes	Measures	Targets
1.1	Review and improve digital accessibility to ensure Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) <sup>1</sup> compliant	Disability; Age	Communications	Year 4	Improved accessibility of online services	Website compliance rating	100% compliance by 2030
1.2	Develop Inclusive and Accessible Communications (plain English, Easy Read, British Sign Language, braille, audio, multilingual content)	All	Communications & Marketing; Customer Services	Years 3–4	Council information is accessible to all residents	Staff trained; accessible content outputs; website accessibility tools usage	100% Communications staff trained by 2028; compliance with WCAG 2.2 Level AA standards
1.3	Continue Inclusive Play agenda including accessible equipment in parks and sensory play	Disability; Dependents; Age	Parks & Estates	Years 1–4	Disabled children can access and play in parks	% new/refurbished parks meeting inclusive design briefs	100% of parks with inclusive equipment/ sensory play by 2030
1.4	Provide inclusive and accessible waste services including assisted lift <sup>2</sup> and additional capacity collections	Disability; Dependents; Age	Waste & Sustainability	Year 2	Residents with additional needs can access waste services	Number of assisted lifts and amount of additional capacity; accessible leaflets	Annual increase in assisted lift or additional capacity uptake; accessible calendar available on request

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.w3.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/residents/bins-recycling/special-collection-assisted-lift/>

The Council can provide a special assisted collection for residents who, due to their age or disability, are unable to present or retrieve their own bin(s) and have no other means of support to do this. Subject to certain criteria, residents can apply for larger capacity domestic waste collections.

## PRIORITY 1: INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

Ref	Action	Section 75 Category	Responsibility Lead	Timescale	Outcomes	Measures	Targets
1.5	Consider/Implement inclusive design principles <sup>3</sup> for all new capital projects	Disability; Dependents; Age	Capital Development; Senior Responsible Officer	Years 1-4	Equality embedded at design stage	Number of projects meeting standards; consultation with S75 groups	100% new capital projects meeting inclusive design standards by 2030
1.6	Introduce Carer Companion Ticket Policy for Council events and facilities (supported by Council's Arts Advisory Panel)	Disability; Dependents	Arts & Culture, Accessibility & Inclusion, Leisure	Years 1-3	Disabled people can attend events without financial disadvantage	Policy adopted; uptake rate	Borough-wide implementation by 2030
1.7	Review and improve the accessibility of toilets, maintain and promote Changing Places <sup>4</sup> toilet facilities	Disability	Senior Responsible Officer; Capital Development; Accessibility and Inclusion; Communications	Years 3-4	Increased accessibility for Disabled customers attending Council facilities and events	Number of accessible toilets and Changing Places facilities	Increase in choice of available Changing Places facilities by 2030

<sup>3</sup> Inclusive design considers everyone, enables equal access, and provides suitable facilities for every need. It should be considered at every stage of a project's lifecycle to result in more successful and inclusive solutions.

<sup>4</sup> <https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/council/accessibility/changing-places-facilities/>

Note: where a timeframe is specified, this means end of year

## PRIORITY 2: PARTICIPATION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PROMOTING GOOD RELATIONS

Ref	Action	Section 75 Category	Responsibility Lead	Timescale	Outcomes	Measures	Targets
2.1	Develop Equality, Diversity, Inclusion (EDI) brand, 'We See You' for inclusion initiatives	All	Communications & Marketing; Organisation Development	Years 1-2	Council visibly promotes inclusion	Brand usage across materials; staff awareness	Brand used in all EDI initiatives by 2028
2.2	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls <sup>5</sup> programme including sexual harassment policy and training	Gender	Community Development, Human Resources; Organisation Development	Years 2-3	Safer workplaces and communities	Policy implementation; staff trained	Policy implemented and staff trained by 2029
2.3	Ensure all largescale Arts & Culture events are accessible (interpreters, accessible toilets, sensory supports, baby feeding)	Disability; Age; Dependents; Gender	Art & Culture; Accessibility & Inclusion	Years 2-3	Inclusive participation in events	Number of access supports provided / Customer experience	Annual increase in accessible events by 2029
2.4	Ensure all largescale Community Development events are accessible (interpreters, accessible toilets, sensory supports, baby feeding)	Disability; Age; Dependents; Gender	Community Development; Accessibility & Inclusion	Year 2	Inclusive participation in events	Number of access supports provided, Customer experience	Establish a departmental baseline of accessibility requirements
2.5	Improve engagement with young people through innovative consultation approaches	Age	Community Development; Customer Services	Years 3-4	Better understanding of youth barriers and needs	Number of youth engagement initiatives; survey feedback	80% of youth agree Council listens to their views by 2030

<sup>5</sup> <https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/residents/community-initiatives/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

## PRIORITY 2: PARTICIPATION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PROMOTING GOOD RELATIONS

Ref	Action	Section 75 Category	Responsibility Lead	Timescale	Outcomes	Measures	Targets
2.6	Increase awareness of equality and diversity themes (campaigns, awareness days, social media)	All	Community Development, Marketing; Accessibility & Inclusion; Customer Services	Year 2	Increased public and staff awareness of inclusion	Number of campaigns/events; engagement metrics	Increased engagement in equality and diversity related campaigns by 2028
2.7	Introduce Managing Unacceptable Behaviours Policy for customers	All	Customer Services; Human Resources	Year 2	Safer working environment for staff	Incidents and actions recorded	Policy implemented by 2028
2.8	Establish lived experience consultation groups (Friends of Council') and continue to engage with existing consultation groups	All	Community Development; Customer Services; Accessibility & Inclusion	Year 2	Meaningful input into decision-making	Meetings held; events delivered; consultee list updates	Group established Year 2; biannual consultee updates

Note: where a timeframe is specified, this means end of year

## PRIORITY 3: WORKFORCE EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

Ref	Action	Section 75 Category	Responsibility Lead	Timescale	Outcomes	Measures	Targets
3.1	Develop EDI policy for staff	All	Accessibility & Inclusion; Human Resources	Year 1-2	Fostering a respectful, safe and fair workplace, ensuing equal opportunities for all employees, preventing discrimination and harassment	Policy adopted; Employment Relations metrics	Policy implemented by 2027
3.2	Maintain and promote EDI charters, accreditations and memberships (British Sign Language & Irish Sign Language Charter <sup>6</sup> , Autism Impact Award <sup>7</sup> , JAM Card <sup>8</sup> , Dementia Friendly <sup>9</sup> )	Disability / Age	Accessibility & Inclusion; Organisation Development	Years 1-4	Council demonstrates commitment to inclusion	Number of charters, accreditations and memberships signed and maintained; training carried out	Annual review and action plans
3.3	Sign Diversity Mark Charter <sup>10</sup> and achieve accreditation	All	Accessibility & Inclusion; Human Resources	Year 3	More diverse workforce and inclusive culture	Accreditation milestones	Sign charter in Year 1; first accreditation achieved by Year 3
3.4	Promote Diversity as a Shared Value in the Organisation (THREADS) <sup>11</sup>	All	Organisation Development	Year 3	A diverse and inclusive workplace culture	Staff engagement metrics	Baseline year 1 & target established by year 3

<sup>6</sup> <https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/council/accessibility/british-irish-sign-language-charter/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/council/accessibility/autism-impact-award/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/jam/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-involved/dementia-friends/dementia-friendly-resources>

<sup>10</sup> <https://diversitymark.org/>

<sup>11</sup> THREADS is the acronym for the Council's values: Trust, Healthy, Respect, Engaged, Ambitious, Diverse, Sustainable

## PRIORITY 3: WORKFORCE EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

Ref	Action	Section 75 Category	Responsibility Lead	Timescale	Outcomes	Measures	Targets
3.5	Establish staff impact groups and feedback channels	All	Accessibility & Inclusion; Human Resources	Years 2-3	Staff voice informs inclusion initiatives; recruitment/retention benefits	Number of groups and feedback sessions	Minimum 3 staff networks established by 2030
3.6	Work towards Disability Positive Employer accreditation <sup>12</sup>	Disability	Accessibility & Inclusion; Human Resources	Years 3-4	Recognition as disability-inclusive employer	Audit results	AAA status achieved by 2030
3.7	Analyse workforce diversity and inclusion data	All	Accessibility & Inclusion; Human Resources	Years 1-2	Understanding of workforce demographics and underrepresentation	Staff diversity data	Baseline established by 2027 & workforce target developed by 2029
3.8	Promote staff health and wellbeing, including mental ill health, by developing opportunities to sign Equality Commission Mental Health Charter <sup>13</sup> and other wellbeing accreditations.	Disability	Organisation Development	Year 2-3	Enhanced understanding of mental health issues; supportive work environment	Number of charters signed and maintained, training carried out	Annual review and action plans

<sup>12</sup> <https://efdni.org/disability-positive-accreditation/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.equalityni.org/mentalhealthcharter>

Note: where a timeframe is specified, this means end of year

## PRIORITY 4: STRENGTHENING EQUALITY GOVERNANCE

Ref	Action	Section 75 Category	Responsibility Lead	Timescale	Outcomes	Measures	Targets
4.1	Establish EDI governance structure and directorate contacts	All	Accessibility & Inclusion	Year 1	Clear accountability for equality	Meetings held Reporting	100% EDI working group meetings reported on
4.2	Continue to deliver a suite of Equality and Disability Awareness training for Elected Members and staff	All	Organisation Development	Years 1-2	Increased capacity to promote equality	Number of sessions delivered; number trained; training evaluation indicators	All staff trained within 6 months of starting; Members trained by 2028
4.3	Develop Artificial Intelligence (AI)* Policy and develop opportunities for enhancing accessibility in delivering Council services	All	IT; Accessibility & Inclusion	Years 3-4	Ensure that usage of AI is inclusive and ethical, whilst enhancing accessibility of services	Policy developed; training delivered; research on AI opportunities carried out	AI policy developed and implemented by 2028; Council using AI to deliver more accessible services by 2030
4.4	Embed equality screening and impact assessments in policy development	All	Accessibility & Inclusion; Equality, Diversity Inclusion Contacts of Directorates	Years 1-2	Equality considered proactively	Number of screenings and assessments; EDI clinics established	100% new/amended policies screened
4.5	Deliver Equality Scheme implementation plan	All	Accessibility & Inclusion Officer	Annual	Statutory compliance on s75 achieved	Reports submitted to Equality Commission	100% on time submissions
4.6	Compliance reporting to Department Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs	All	Accessibility & Inclusion	Annual	Statutory compliance on Rural Needs achieved	Reports submitted	100% on-time submissions

*\*Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to any technology or machine that can perform complex tasks typically associated with human intelligence. These tasks can include problem-solving, planning, reasoning, and decision-making.*

## PRIORITY 5: REDUCING HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND PROMOTING INCLUSIVE WELLBEING

Ref	Action	Section 75 Category	Responsibility Lead	Timescale	Outcomes	Measures	Targets
5.1	Deliver Age Friendly Plan <sup>14</sup> and achieve Age Friendly Council Status <sup>15</sup>	Age; Disability; Dependents	Environmental Health; Accessibility & Inclusion, Human Resources	Year 3	Older people actively participate in community life	Delivery of objectives highlighted within the Council three-year action plan	Completion of 34 actions within three-year of age friendly action plan by 2028
5.2	Deliver 'Breastfeeding Welcome Here' <sup>16</sup> Scheme both within Council and across the Borough	Gender; Dependents	Environmental Health; Organisation Development; Human Resources	Year 3	Parents feel welcome to breastfeed in Council spaces and across communities	Premises participating and businesses engaged	All appropriate council premises signed up to the scheme, staff training undertaken, increased number of businesses participating in the Public Health Agency scheme
5.3	Ensure all leisure centres maintain an adequate supply of accessible equipment, adaptive aids, and inclusive signage to support participation across all s75 groups	All	Leisure; Accessibility & Inclusion	Years 1–4	Improved accessibility and user experience across all facilities	Annual audit of accessibility equipment, signage and compliance	100% of centres meeting agreed accessibility standards annually

<sup>14</sup> <https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/residents/community-initiatives/age-friendly/age-friendly-action-plan/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://ageing-better.org.uk/employer-pledge>

<sup>16</sup> <https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/residents/community-initiatives/breastfeeding-welcome-here/>

## PRIORITY 5: REDUCING HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND PROMOTING INCLUSIVE WELLBEING

Ref	Action	Section 75 Category	Responsibility Lead	Timescale	Outcomes	Measures	Targets
5.4	Strengthen engagement with local sports clubs to promote inclusive practice, provide development support, and create pathways for underrepresented S75 groups	All	Sports Development; Accessibility & Inclusion	Years 1-4	Increased club capability to deliver inclusive programmes	Number of clubs engaged; number receiving support; inclusive programmes created	Engage minimum 12 clubs per year and develop at least 3 new inclusive pathways annually
5.5	Enhance staff training to ensure effective first-point-of-contact support, including British Sign Language (BSL) Level 1, disability awareness, less visible disabilities, neurodiversity and inclusive customer-service modules in leisure centres	Disability	Leisure; Organisation Development	Years 1-4	Improved staff confidence and ability to meet diverse customer needs	Number of staff trained, training modules delivered; customer satisfaction feedback	Minimum two staff per centre trained to BSL Level 1; all frontline staff to complete inclusive-service training by 2030
5.6	Deliver poverty reduction measures and associated plans	All	Community Planning and Development, Environmental Health, Economic Development,	Year 4	Reducing deprivation and increasing access to opportunities	Number of beneficiaries, programmes and training delivered	Completion of 24 actions within the Anti-Poverty Strategy <sup>17</sup> by 2030

<sup>17</sup> <https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/residents/residents-community-information/community-planning/anti-poverty-strategy/>

## PRIORITY 6: INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Ref	Action	Section 75 Category	Responsibility Lead	Timescale	Outcomes	Measures	Targets
6.1	To build workplace inclusion in the Council, support work experience and employment pathways for underrepresented groups	All	Human Resources; Accessibility & Inclusion	Years 2-3	Inclusive employment opportunities in Council	Number of placements and ring-fenced posts	Baseline a minimum number of annual placements and entry level roles in year 2
6.2	Support work experience and employment pathways for underrepresented groups through outreach campaigns in Borough (such as Labour Market Partnership <sup>18</sup> employability scheme & the work experience programme)	All	Economic Development	Years 1-4	Inclusive employment opportunities in Borough	Number of people supported into work placements/ employment/ new qualification/ upskilled	Increase in number of people supported into work placements/ employment/ new qualification/ upskilled
6.3	Develop Inclusive Recruitment Plan linked to Diversity Mark and Disability Positive	All	Accessibility & Inclusion; Human Resources	Years 3-4	Equitable and accessible recruitment processes	Recruitment outcomes by S75 category	Increase in candidates and appointments from underrepresented groups by 2030
6.4	Increase business start-ups among underrepresented groups	All	Economic Development	Years 1-4	More inclusive local economy	Number and % of start-ups from target groups	Year-on-year growth in inclusive entrepreneurship
6.5	Participate in JobStart 50+ <sup>19</sup> programme (contingent upon Department for Communities' programme continuity and availability of funding from both DfC and Council)	Age	Human Resources	As appropriate in accordance with programme	Help unemployed or economically inactive people aged 50-64 re-enter the workforce	Number of placements	Minimum annual placements

<sup>18</sup> <https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/business/skills-employability/antrim-and-newtownabbey-labour-market-partnership/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/jobstart-scheme>





