



Commissioner
for **Survivors**
of Institutional
Childhood Abuse

DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

*Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse
(The Office of the Commissioner)*

Purpose of The Office of the Commissioner

The principal duty of the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse is to represent the interests of victims and survivors of non-recent/ historical institutional child abuse as defined under legislation. We understand from our engagement with victims and survivors and working in partnership with therapeutic services providers of the range of supports/ needs of victims and survivors of non-recent/ historical institutional child abuse. While not a therapeutic service provider, we strive as an Office to carry out our legislative responsibilities and duties according to the trauma-informed principles and practices.

Powers and duties of the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse

The Office of the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse (The Office of the Commissioner) was established on 14 December 2020, in accordance with the recommendations outlined in the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Report published in January 2017, and under the terms of the Historical Institutional Abuse (Northern Ireland) Act 2019 (HIA NI Act 2019). The Office of the Commissioner is a Non-Departmental Public Body of The Executive Office (TEO).

Under the HIA NI Act 2019 the principal aim of The Office of the Commissioner is to represent the interests of victims and survivors of institutional childhood abuse, defined as any person who suffered abuse while a child and while resident in an institution between 1922 and 1995.

The Office of the Commissioner's additional statutory functions and duties in relation to victims and survivors of institutional childhood abuse include: advising on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors; establishing an advisory panel of victims and survivors; encouraging the provision and coordination of services and where appropriate identifying gaps; monitoring specialist facilities for victims and survivors; monitoring and publicising the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board.

In furtherance of these functions the HIA NI Act 2019 provides The Office of the Commissioner with a number of statutory powers:

- Powers to undertake or commission research into matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors.
- Powers to compile information concerning the interests of victims and survivors.
- Powers to provide advice or information on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors.
- Powers to publish anything concerning the interests of victims and survivors.
- Powers to make representations or recommendations to any person concerning the interests of victims and survivors.

Introduction

1.1 Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Office of the Commissioner is required when carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life ('the disability duties').

Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Office of the Commissioner is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a **disability action plan** showing how it proposes to fulfill these duties in relation to its functions.

1.2 As Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse, we are committed to implementing effectively our duties in relation to disability and this disability action plan. We will allocate all necessary resources (in terms of people, time and money) in order to implement effectively this plan and where appropriate, build objectives and targets relating to duties in relation to disability into corporate and annual operating plans.

We will ensure appropriate internal arrangements are in place so that the duties relating to disability are complied with and this disability action plan effectively implemented. We will ensure the effective communication of the plan to staff and to providing all necessary training and guidance for staff on disability related duties and the implementation of the plan.

We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual report to the Equality Commission on the implementation of this plan as well as carrying out a five yearly review of this plan.

We affirm our commitment to consulting with people with disabilities and their representatives when implementing and reviewing this plan.

Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating this disability action plan and the point of contact within the Office of the Commissioner will be:

Name: Susie Harper

Title: Head Corporate Services

Address: 5th Floor South, Queen's Court, 56-66 Upper Queen Street, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT1 6FD

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Email: Susan.harper@cosica-ni.org

Web: www.cosica-ni.org

If you require this plan in an alternative format (such as in large print, in Braille, on audio cassette, easy read or on computer disc) and/or language, please contact the above person to discuss your requirements.

- 1.3** The Office of the Commissioner confirms its commitment to submitting an annual progress report on the implementation of this plan to the Equality Commission and carrying out a review of this plan after three years, or plans submitted to the Equality Commission over the term of the Commissioner’s office.

A copy of this plan is available on our website at www.cosica-ni.org within the Equality section, where all Annual Progress Reports on Section 75 implementation and Disability Action Plan implementation can also be found. Press releases will be issued as appropriate to help publicise the issue of these documents.

Functions

- 1.4** Outlined below are the range of functions of the Office of the Commissioner, the role, principle aims, general duties and powers of the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse is set out in the Historical Institutional Abuse (NI) Act 2019.

Principal aim of the Commissioner

The principal aim of the Commissioner in exercising functions under this Act is to promote the interests of any person who suffered abuse while a child and while resident in an institution at some time between 1922 and 1995 (both inclusive).

Persons of the description given in subsection above are referred to in this Part as “victims and survivors”.

General duties of the Commissioner

The Commissioner must provide advice on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors to the Executive Office or a person providing services to victims and survivors:

- (a) as soon as reasonably practicable after receiving a request for advice; and
- (b) on whatever other occasions the Commissioner thinks appropriate.

The Commissioner must take reasonable steps to ensure that victims and survivors are made aware of:

- (a) the functions of the Commissioner.
- (b) the location of the Commissioner; and
- (c) the ways in which they may communicate with the Commissioner.

Powers of the Commissioner

The Commissioner may undertake or commission research into matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors.

The Commissioner may:

- (a) compile information concerning the interests of victims and survivors.
- (b) provide advice or information on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors.
- (c) publish anything concerning the interests of victims and survivors, including:
 - (i) the results of research undertaken or commissioned under subsection [\(1\)](#); and
 - (ii) advice provided by the Commissioner.

The Commissioner may make representations or recommendations to any person about matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors.

Co-ordination of service provision etc

The Commissioner must encourage the provision, and the coordination of the provision, of relevant services in Northern Ireland to victims and survivors.

“Relevant service” means a service designed:

- (a) to improve a person’s physical or mental health.
- (b) to help a person to overcome an addiction.

- (c) to provide a person with counselling.
- (d) to improve a person's literacy or numeracy.
- (e) to provide a person with other education or training; or
- (f) to enable a person to access opportunities for work.

In carrying out the duty where she must encourage the provision, and the coordination of the provision, of relevant services in Northern Ireland to victims and survivors, the Commissioner must take account of the current provision of relevant services to victims and survivors and must identify any gaps in the provision of those services.

The Commissioner must provide, or secure the provision of, advice and information to victims and survivors on:

- (a) the relevant services that are available to them and the facilities that are available for the provision of those services; and
- (b) how to obtain those services and access those facilities.

The Commissioner must, on becoming aware in the course of exercising the Commissioner's functions of a matter which comes within the area of responsibility of the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, consult that Commissioner.

Monitoring specialist facilities

The Commissioner must monitor the operation of whatever facilities there are currently available in Northern Ireland which are solely for providing victims and survivors with:

- (a) counselling and supplementary information about how to access health services, housing services, education services or employment services.
- (b) help to improve literacy or numeracy; or
- (c) advice on opportunities for education or work or on entitlements to housing or social security benefits.

Functions relating to the HIA Board, etc

The Commissioner must make arrangements for publicising the role of the Board.

Where a person is considering whether to make an application to the Board for compensation under Part 1, the Commissioner must provide the person with:

- (a) such general advice and information on making the application as the person requests; and
- (b) if the person wishes to obtain information relating to any period in which the person by or in respect of whom the application would be made was resident in an institution while under the age of 18, such assistance in obtaining that information as it is reasonable for the Commissioner to provide.

The Commissioner must monitor the operation of the Board.

The Commissioner may establish, or make arrangements for establishing, a panel of solicitors, the members of which the Commissioner is satisfied have the necessary expertise for providing legal advice and assistance on applications and appeals under Part 1.

Public Life Positions

- 1.5** The recruitment and selection for all positions within the Office of the Commissioner will be undertaken in accordance with the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and with due regard to the disability duties.

The Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse is supported by a governing committee – the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC). The membership of the ARAC is independent of the Commissioner and consists of 3 external members; these are the only *public life* positions open to adults within the Commissioner’s office.

The ARAC supports the Commissioner (Accounting Officer) in monitoring risk, control, governance and financial reporting. Additionally, the ARAC gives advice to the Accounting Officer on the adequacy of coverage of audit arrangements (internal and external) to provide the required assurances.

ARAC members are appointed for 3.5 years and are eligible to be reappointed at the end of this period for a further 5 years (this would be subject to the the Office of the Commissioner office remaining under current legislative review). A recruitment campaign took place during 2021 and positions were advertised in the Press and on the the Office of the Commissioner's website. The Disability Employment Service was also advised of the recruitment campaign.

2 Previous Measures

There were no previous measures on the plan, this is the first submission of a disability action plan for The Office of the Commissioner seeking endorsement.

Outlined below are the key measures which The Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse has undertaken and proposes to undertake once the disability action plan has been endorsed by the Equality Commission. During 2024-25 the Office will promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people

- The Commissioner for survivors of institutional childhood abuse has represented the interests of victims and survivors of non-recent/ historical institutional child abuse many of whom have experienced significant trauma as a result of their experiences with associated physical and psychological impacts including disability in addition to also exacerbating pre-existing disabilities
- Inclusion of disability and equality within the Office business and corporate plans
- Training and guidance will be provided for all staff and office holders on the disability equality legislation and disability awareness.

Encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

- Identify and promote an advocate or specialist within the Office of the Commissioner with a role to support and advise staff on disability issues
- To review access to information and services relevant to disabled people
- To publish and promote the disability action plan

3 Action Measures

Outlined below are the measures which we propose to take over the period of 3 years of this disability action plan, together with performance indicators or targets.

Building Organisational Commitment					
<i>Ref</i>	<i>Action Measure</i>	<i>DDA Measure</i>	<i>Key Performance indicator</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
1	To set out our commitments to disability equality in Corporate Business Plans, of which this action plan forms a part	Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.	Annual business plan will take account of and reinforce our commitment to implementation of the disability duties and other requirements under DDA legislation.	Head of Office/ Head of Corporate services	Annually (April)
2	Continue to represent the interests of victims and survivors of non-recent/historical institutional child abuse many of whom have experienced significant trauma as a result of their experiences with associated physical and psychological impacts including disability in addition to also exacerbating pre-existing disabilities	Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.	Monitored within the annual business plan and ensuring account taken with regards to individuals with disabilities	Commissioner/ Head of Office	Ongoing

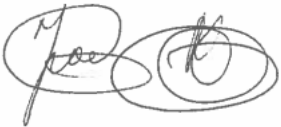
Staff Training and Awareness Raising					
<i>Ref</i>	<i>Action Measure</i>	<i>DDA Measure</i>	<i>Key Performance indicator</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
3	Training and guidance to be provided for all staff and office holders on the disability equality legislation and disability awareness.	Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.	Annual business plan and individual staff development plans	Head of Office/Head of Corporate Services	Ongoing, 6 monthly and yearly reviews.
4	Ensure training on the 'Disability Code of Practice' is provided for staff involved in recruitment and selection panels.	Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.	Corporate business plan	Head of Corporate	As and when required for recruitment/selection processes
5	Equality and Diversity training will be provided to all existing and then subsequently all new employees. This will be through Links programme.	Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.	Individual staff development plans	Head of Corporate	Within one year of commencement of employment.
6	Age Awareness training will be provided to all existing and then subsequently all new employees within one year of commencement of employment. Working with COPNI this measure will be discharged.	Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.	individual staff development plans	Head of Corporate	Within one year of commencement of employment.

Staff Training and Awareness Raising					
<i>Ref</i>	<i>Action Measure</i>	<i>DDA Measure</i>	<i>Key Performance indicator</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
7	Dementia Awareness training will be provided to all existing and then subsequently all new employees within one year of commencement of employment. JAM awareness training scheme.	Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.	individual staff development plans	Head of Corporate	Within one year of commencement of employment.
8	Training will be on-going, relevant, and updated to take account of changes in legislation, as required.	Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.	individual staff development plans	Head of Corporate	Ongoing
Partnership Working					
9	Identify and promote a champion within the Office of the Commissioner with a role to support and advise staff on disability issues	Encourage participation by disabled people in public life	COSICA will establish a champion who will progress any recommendations from disability action groups	Head of Corporate Services	Ongoing

Communication					
<i>Ref</i>	<i>Action Measure</i>	<i>DDA Measure</i>	<i>Key Performance indicator</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
10	To review access to information and services relevant to disabled people	Encourage participation by disabled people in public life	Feedback and complaints received from service users to identify areas for improvement and service delivery daily.	Head of Policy, Research and Engagement	Ongoing
11	To publish and promote the disability action plan	Encourage participation by disabled people in public life	The DAP will be published electronically and circulated to all staff. All COSICA staff will be notified of the publication	Head of Policy Research and Engagement	As soon as agreed with Equality commission December 2024
12	Victims and Survivors living with a disability and their representatives will be invited to provide views on draft disability action plan and draft key priorities.	Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.	At least one article every quarter	Head of Policy Research and Engagement	Quarterly once action plan agreed This will be achieved through the Advisory panel once established.
Monitoring					
13	Regularly reviewed at SMT and quarterly review alongside ARAC	Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.	Once a quarter	Head of Corporate Services	Ongoing

Compliance					
<i>Ref</i>	<i>Action Measure</i>	<i>DDA Measure</i>	<i>Key Performance indicator</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
14	Regularly review this DDAP to ensure that the Office of the Commissioner are on target and fulfilling their objectives.	Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.	Once a quarter	Head of Corporate Services	Ongoing

Signed by:



COMMISSIONER

Notes:

The Office of the Commissioner Disability Action Plan is normally aligned with our business planning cycle; that is, it will usually cover a three-year period, mirroring the Office of the Commissioner Corporate Plan.