***Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation******Acme Company***

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**Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties**

**Annual Progress Report 2020-21**

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| Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at: https://www.uregni.gov.uk/equality |
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**This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.**

**It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.**

**This report reflects progress made between April 2020 and March 2021**

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| **PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme****Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice** |
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| **1** | In 2020-21, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.*Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.* |
|  | During the reporting period, we (the Utility Regulator (UR)) continued to build on the work previously carried out to maintain and improve equality of opportunity and good relations as a mainstream element of our corporate goals and values.A formal review of the current equality scheme and disability action plan took place during 2017/18 and an Action Plan was agree for 5 years from 2018-2023 HR monitor the on-going process of improvement in equality awareness and other related policies and procedures, with assistance from managers and both union and non-union staff representatives.We continued to be represented in forums aimed at tackling fuel poverty in Northern Ireland (NI). We continue to work closely with the Department for Economy (DfE) to consider the future development of energy efficiency provision in NI. We are also represented on the NI Home Energy Conservation Authority (HECA) Panel, which seeks to improve the energy efficiency of NI properties thus also alleviating the impact of fuel poverty. The NI Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) continued to provide 80% of its funding for energy efficiency measures to be installed in vulnerable households. In 2018-19 over £7m was spent on schemes providing heating systems and insulation with the aim of reducing energy costs and improving comfort for households at risk of fuel poverty.The NISEP has been extended until March 2025 or until a suitable replacement has been identified in the DfE Energy Strategy and will continue to target 80% of funding into energy efficiency schemes for vulnerable households. Fifteen priority schemes have been approved to provide a range of energy efficiency measures including heating systems, loft and cavity insulation, low energy lighting, shower regulators, radiator panels and heating controllers.All electricity and gas suppliers operating in the NI retail market must produce, gain approval for, and comply with the Energy Supplier Codes of Practice.  For electricity suppliers this is a mandatory licence requirement under conditions 30-35 of the electricity supply licences.  For gas suppliers this is a mandatory licence requirement under conditions 2.8-2.13 of the gas supply licences.In order to ensure a consistently high standard, and after an extensive engagement process, we published minimum standards for Codes of Practice.  These minimum standards help to ensure that customers, and in particular vulnerable customers, are further protected in their relationship and dealings with electricity and natural gas suppliers.The codes cover the following areas:* Code of Practice on Payment of Bills
* Code of Practice on Provision of Services for persons who are of Pensionable Age or Disabled or Chronically Sick
* Code of Practice on Complaints Handling Procedure
* Code of Practice on Services for Prepayment Meter Customers
* Code of Practice on the efficient use of electricity and gas

Once approved, each supplier must publish a copy of its Codes of Practice on its own company website[[1]](#footnote-2), which it must then comply. Compliance with the Codes of Practice is monitored through the suppliers’ annual returns (Statement of Licence Compliance) submitted via the Retail Energy Market Monitoring (REMM) arrangements which are outlined further below. Failure to comply with a Code of Practice, which has been approved by us, could constitute a breach of licence conditions.In addition, suppliers must also comply with the following Codes of Practice:* Marketing Code of Practice (Domestic and Non domestic Codes)
* Code of Practice on Energy Bills and Statements (Domestic and Non-Domestic Codes)
* Codes of Practice for Energy Theft

After these codes were published by the UR, a licence requirement was placed on suppliers to comply with each code. For electricity suppliers these are licence requirements under conditions 40, 38(2) and 46. For gas suppliers these are licence requirements under conditions 2.21, 2.19.2 and 2.30.For the Codes of Practice for Energy Theft, regulated companies established industry procedures to comply with the Code and facilitate the prevention, detection and investigation of energy theft. Compliance with these Codes is monitored through the supplier’s annual returns (Statement of Licence Compliance) submitted via the Retail Energy Market Monitoring (REMM) arrangements which are outlined further below.Protecting consumers is at the heart of our role. This is particularly important in relation to energy retail markets where the industries we regulate directly interface with consumers. We also seek to ensure customer protection by means of effective and timely enforcement of licence obligations in line with promoting functioning markets.**Retail Energy Market Monitoring (REMM)** Following a comprehensive consultation and industry engagement process in 2015-16, we implemented an enhanced REMM framework. REMM is a robust framework to monitor market indicators as well as supplier's compliance with their electricity and gas supply licences. The REMM is a useful tool for informing policy and ensuring the highest levels of consumer protection and we continue to work with all our stakeholders to ensure that it is delivered effectively. The REMM decision paper was published in June 2015. REMM was subject to screening as part of the decision making process and no negative impacts were highlighted as part of the project implementation. The Market Regulation and Monitoring team uses the REMM data to establish trend information and it is the primary source of internal information for policy discussions including the information used in our published Annual and Quarterly REMM reports. A key part of REMM is the supplier’s annual submission of their Statement of Licence Compliance. This allows the UR to monitor individual supplier compliance against all licence conditions and to rectify any highlighted compliance issues. This work has continued throughout the reporting period.We also conducted independent audits of supplier licence compliance that focussed on the quality of REMM data submissions and the Code of Practice on Services for Prepayment Meter Customers. The audit findings and implementation of its recommendations will ensure the accurate completion of REMM data and that suppliers are achieving the prescribed ‘minimum standards’ set out in the Codes of Practice which will lead to improved and consistent outcomes for customers through improved delivery of the Codes of Practice. The results of the audit will be published to provide full transparency and to facilitate consumers making informed choices regarding their energy supplier.We are also continuing to enhance the REMM framework with the following objectives:1. Data optimisation (ensuring an accurate and efficient data collection, data processing and data storage system);
2. Data Quality (enhancing the quality of the data that is submitted); and
3. Enhancing the reporting of retail market and consumer outcomes both internally (to aid regulator decisions) and externally (to promote transparency, reputational incentives and consumer empowerment).

During the 2020/21 reporting period, we enhanced REMM by introducing new metrics to monitor the implementation of the Energy Supplier Codes of Practice. In order to assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the energy market the Market Regulation and Monitoring team introduced further monitoring metrics. These are outlined in the Covid-19 section further below.**Consumer Protection Programme** The Consumer Protection Programme (CPP) is a prioritised 3-year programme. Each of the projects identified in the CPP is expected to have a positive impact on domestic electricity, gas and water consumers. The costs and benefits of each project will be identified during the scoping phases of the individual projects. Delivery of the CPP started in April 2019. However, in June 2020 the development and delivery of the CPP was deferred due to issues around Covid-19. The UR board endorsed a proposal to review and re-scope the CPP in January 2021. The aim was to incorporate lessons learned from the pandemic and to resume the CPP in April 2021. We have identified the impact of increasing levels of domestic debt associated with economic difficulties of the pandemic. The revised CPP will now have a clear focus on debt, looking at supplier debt communications, assessment of ability to pay and research on consumer lived experience of energy debt and how to further support those customers who need it. We will also explore the emerging issues around digital exclusion for utility consumers. More companies are using digital channels for services, messaging, notifications, and engagement with their customers. We will explore the potential for a ‘digital divide’ with a view to protecting those who are digitally excluded due to lack of access to opportunities, knowledge, goods and services.**Quick Check 101 Review** In January 2018, the Quick Check 101 scheme, which was designed to combat the incidences of bogus callers, was launched. Quick Check 101 provides domestic consumers with a facility to telephone the police 101 non-emergency number to check the identity of callers to their home who claim to represent an energy or water network company. Quick Check 101 is a collaboration between The Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI), energy and water network companies, supported by the Commissioner for Older People, and us in a bid to help people feel safer in their homes. Following a year of operational delivery, we reviewed Quick Check 101 and outlined next steps in January 2019. Overall, the review revealed a scheme that was functioning well, but recommended the development and adoption of a standardised communication plan and the widening of the parties involved in Quick Check 101 to include gas suppliers. Following this review, Quick Check 101 parties will now adopt and implement a standardised communication plan – referring to frequency of messaging, use of media platforms and content. Quick Check 101 has run in this enhanced membership configuration (including gas suppliers) for another year (2020/21). We will investigate the possibility of extending Quick Check 101 to all domestic suppliers (electricity and gas) in NI during 2021/22.**Care Register Review** The review of the care registers held by Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIE Networks) and Northern Ireland Water (NI Water) is now complete. These registers provide certain services to vulnerable consumers who choose to be included on care registers. The registers are for consumers who require special assistance as they are at a greater risk of harm. Consumers likely to avail of these special services typically include those of pensionable age, who are disabled or chronically sick. The main output of the review has been the development and publication of a joint registration leaflet. NIE Networks and NI Water collaborated to produce a consumer-friendly leaflet that promotes the services of their respective registers and contains a facility for consumers to sign-up to either of the registers or both. In addition, both companies have come together to put in place a ‘warm transfer’ facility in their call centres which allows vulnerable consumers to be transferred seamlessly between each company; reducing confusion and potential distress to the consumer when signing up to the care registers. These additional consumer protections have been welcomed by consumer representatives as a step forward in delivering positive material outcomes for vulnerable consumers. Ongoing work in this area has now been incorporated in the Best Practice Framework (see below) as the need for improved mechanisms for identification of vulnerability, increased awareness of care registers and industry collaboration to protect vulnerable consumers.**Best Practice Frameworks**The aim of this longer-term programme is to identify and establish the best practice measures that regulated companies in Northern Ireland should have in place to identify, assist and protect consumers in vulnerable circumstances. The core building blocks to implementation include:1. Culture, ethos and staff training
2. Identification of vulnerability
3. Practical measures for those in need: financial and non-financial
4. Data collection and sharing
5. Monitoring, reporting and publication

During 2020/21, we worked with industry and consumer representatives to identify the key building blocks and identify how to operationalise proposed measures. This programme will continue out to 2024 resulting in a new mandatory “minimum standards” Code(s) of Practice for suppliers and network companies. **Consumer Vulnerability Working Group**The Consumer Vulnerability Working Group (CVWG), established in 2018, has continued to meet and provide the UR with a consumer representative voice in regards to consumer protection matters. The membership of the CVWG includes consumer representative bodies and statutory agencies, all at a senior level (manager and director level). The organisations represented are: (1) Advice NI, (2) Christians Against Poverty, (3) CCNI, (4) Commissioner for Older People, (5) NEA, (6) Public Health Agency and (7) The Energy Saving Trust. In 2020, Bryson Energy joined the group. Bryson is a Social Enterprise and a not-for-profit charitable organisation that focuses on fuel poverty and health related programmes. The CVWG is chaired by CCNI and so is independent of the UR. The CVWG remit has evolved and is now focused on providing consumer insight and challenge to the UR in relation to wider consumer protection policy developments. During 2017/18 in conjunction with the natural gas industry and consumer representative groups, we took forward arrangements needed if a gas supplier leaves the market unexpectedly. The gas Supplier of Last Resort (SoLR) arrangements are necessary to clarify the requirements and the process for all industry participants should a SoLR event be initiated. Necessary licence modifications to make these arrangements mandatory on all licensees came into effect in August 2018. All participants have agreed SoLR test plans for all participants, including scope of the inaugural test and the requirements of test reporting to the UR. We completed planned testing of the SoLR arrangements in May 2021.We carried out tariff reviews for firmus Energy Ltd, SSE Airtricity Gas Supply NI Ltd and Power NI during 2020-21. This included liaising with stakeholders such as the DfE and the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI) during the review process.**COVID-19**In response to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, we engaged regularly with key industry stakeholders to assess and manage the impact for consumers with respect to provision of energy and related services to consumers and associated costs. Particular focus was given to ensuring a secure and affordable energy supply to vulnerable consumers. As a result of this engagement, a number of measures were implemented to address shortcomings identified. For example, the existing gas prepayment meters could only be topped up by physically going into one of the designated shops to charge up the card, which presented an issue for certain consumers having to isolate at home. As an interim solution, meter readers provided top-up assistance where needed. In addition, a working group has now been set up to implement a more robust, enduring solution, including remote top up functionality. We also put in place market and consumer monitoring metrics to allow some insight on the impact of Covid-19 on which to base policy decisions: * From suppliers these include customers in debt, customer payment behaviour and customer communications regarding problems with topping up keypad meters.
* From the network operators these include disconnections (due to reasons other than health & safety) and communications.

During the Covid-19 pandemic we liaised closely with wider Government bodies to ensure consumers, especially the most vulnerable, were protected. We reviewed the supplier communications sent to customers since the start of the Covid-19 crisis and developed a communication strategy for suppliers in order to facilitate a more consistent approach to customer engagement. We wrote to all domestic energy suppliers about their response to the Covid-19 crisis. Suppliers confirmed they were engaging with consumers in an appropriate way about debt and complying with all their consumer protection minimum standards despite the more difficult working conditions. We facilitated a good working relationship between Advice NI and Bryson Energy and energy suppliers in order to promote access to independent debt advice for energy consumers in debt and financial support. As a result of Covid 19 we are now, focusing on the pandemic’s medium to longer-term impact on consumer energy debt in the coming year.  The 2019/20 NISEP year was also extended to ensure consumers who were awaiting NISEP funded measures to be installed, were able to have this done as per government guidance. Where this was not possible, the funding was reallocated to the Primary Bidders for the 2020/21 to ensure consumers were not disadvantaged.We also put in place remote working arrangements for all staff, conducted associated display screen equipment risk assessments and put in place procedures for access to the office where needed, to minimise the risks to health and safety for all staff. This includes in particular those with increased risk of Covid-19 infection or living with or caring for others with such risk. **Energy Transition** |

Throughout the reporting year, we have been engaging with DfE on the development of the new energy strategy for Northern Ireland. In so doing, we have sought to ensure that the interests of energy consumers in Northern Ireland, including those of section 75 categories, are considered and accounted, for example by prioritising and emphasising vulnerable consumer issues at the DFE Consumer Working group. In addition, we have undertaken research with a representative sample of Northern Ireland consumers to find out their opinions on various issues related to climate change, net zero and the energy transition.  The sample was representative of the NI population in terms of age, gender, disability, income, etc. We will use the results of this research to develop more in depth research in the coming year to better understand the specific needs of certain consumer groups and the challenges they may face in the energy transition.

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| **Arrangements for Provision of Gas to Northern Ireland**During the reporting year, we have undertaken work in a number of areas of relevance to the provision of gas to consumers in Northern Ireland, including those in section 75 categories. In particular, engagement is ongoing with the relevant parties on the extension of the contractual arrangements that underpin the direct access of Northern Ireland to the GB gas market and which would otherwise come to an end at the end of September 2021. We have also been considering the arrangements for offtakes in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland respectively from the pipelines built to bring gas into Northern Ireland. The impact of these developments on gas costs and security of supply for all natural gas consumers in Northern Ireland, including in particular those of section 75 categories, is being considered. We engaged with the gas transmission companies to facilitate the rescheduling of capital expenditure to ensure more certainty for suppliers over the transmission charge. This reduced any reconciliation bill faced by suppliers for transmission charges at the end of the year, which would be difficult to pass on to customers and reduces risk of suppliers exiting the market due to debt issues.Following the redevelopment of our website in 2016/2017, we continue to promote easier access to information and improve the ease of use for all stakeholders. We are also continuing to take steps to improve the accessibility of our website by ensuring the web news blurb is consumer friendly and is in plain English. In February 2018, we began our Investors in People (IiP) journey, following our initial assessment we received a standard accreditation, which recognised that our staff enjoy very good terms and conditions. Following on from this we consulted with staff internally and developed a 3 year IiP Action Plan 2018- 2021 which was endorsed by the Remuneration Committee. This resulted in a Silver Award from IiP in February 2021. Following this we re-engaged our UR People Group (URP) which had been set up in 2019. The group comprised of a small core group of HR and Communications staff to drive the day-to-day plan delivery, along with a staff team made up of representatives across directorates and grades to take an active a role in overseeing and supporting the ongoing delivery of the URP plan. During the reporting period and shortly following the 24-month review period, the emergence of Covid-19 meant that focus turned to ensuring the functions of the UR could continue remotely, while trying to keep momentum on our planned URP priorities and ensure staff health and wellbeing. During the reporting period, year 3 of the action plan, the URP group focused on actions and associated activities such as ensuring all staff were able to work remotely. By Mid-April, all staff were able to work on line and had been issued with a mini desktop or laptop. Arrangements were put in place for any staff to take chairs and equipment home to ensure a suitable workspace could be set up. In May, WebEx training sessions were organised to support the introduction of WebEx a secure remote meeting platform, this has now been largely replaced by MSTeams. All staff were also set up with access to Centre for Applied Learning training courses through NICS Links. By Mid-August the rollout of laptops to all staff, currently working on mini desktops, was complete meaning that all staff were working on the same platform.* UR’s Health and Safety Committee comprises trade union and management representatives and met to consider amongst other issues, the development of a detailed Covid-19 risk assessment and management plan for Queens House to manage remote working and return to Queens House. This also included an Equality Impact Assessment.
* Ensuring we had an effective method of communicating and engaging with staff remotely became our key focus. The volume of internal communications increased significantly including weekly URP updates and CEO Vlogs; the use of SMS messaging to make staff aware of key developments and online Senior Leadership Team meetings. Links were circulated to support staff in working from home remotely while home schooling. Guidance for staff on managing annual leave and work life balance and performance management was provided and a homeworking checklist was produced for the intranet to provide health and safety guidance for staff while working from home. This engagement has continued during the reporting period with our new CEO introducing weekly all staff meetings, virtual coffee breaks and informal online catch-ups encouraged.
* We carried out a staff wellbeing survey in June, which produced a 90%+ response and helped provide valuable feedback on the views of our staff on the working from home experience. UR’s annual health and wellbeing programme was amended to run throughout the year to deliver sessions driven by the Covid-19 lockdown and activities are focused on online mental health and work life balance support such as:
* Building Resilience and Managing Stress in uncertain times
* Parent/Carer Well-being sessions May 2020;
* Mental Health Awareness Session
* Mindful Manager Mental Health First Aid Training;
* Remote yoga and Pilates classes;
* Managing Personal Stress and Resilience;
* Positive mental health toolkit for line managers/staff.
	+ We also delivered Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) training such as Jam Training; Neuro Diverse Training; Communicating Remotely- Hearing Loss Awareness. In February 2021, many staff attended Equality, Diversity and Unconscious Bias training which included a Transgender Awareness talk.
* We increased our promotion of staff support already available such as: Inspire, Welfare Support Service and Mental Health First Aiders. We consulted with union colleagues via the URP group, on our Performance Management documentation that includes a new management objective and focus around learning and development and a new format for promoting engagement on personal development and self-evaluation values checker.
* We produced and started to deliver on our CSR programme.
* We focused on promoting our values to include a series of values talks, the first one in October 2020 by our exiting CEO Jenny Pyper on her personal values; Dr Finian Buckley “Trust” in November 2020; and Kieran Hughes from our Corporate Charity (the Welcome organisation) in January 2021.
* UR values has been included as essential criteria on all recruitment and selection processes going forward at all levels. We have rolled out a programme to support learning and sharing across organisation including a series of coffee time sessions, hosted by staff across directorates. We have promoted a “Time to Talk” initiatuve and, as essential component of gauging well being among staff, managers and staff tcompleted their performance management mid-year reviews by end of November 2020. The significance of these meetings lies not only in performance management but also in the wider opportunity to make contract with staff individually promoting the importance of mental health and wellbeing.

Taking on board the feedback from the IiP Assessor’s report, the process is now underway to develop a new URP plan 2021-24, which will continue to focus on finding ways to promote and develop effective ways of working together to better engage and motivate staff; developing and reinforcing UR culture that is based on UR values. The URP plan will be developed through engagement with staff via the URP group and with assistance from the Remuneration Committee. We hope to launch the new plan around September 2021. During the reporting period, we undertook a staff engagement survey with Best Companies, in order to benchmark the UR against recognised top companies in the areas of Management, Leadership, My Company, Personal Growth, My Team, Wellbeing, Fair deal and Giving Something Back. The results which were received in April 2021,placed UR in the “one to watch” category and will be used to focus on areas of improvement which will tie into the URP plan currently being developed. The UR Leadership Development programme, which commenced November 2018, is intended to respond to the IiP assessment feedback under the “Leading and Inspiring” indicator. Marie Grattan, from Future Spark Coaching, worked with us to develop a programme to inspire an ongoing process of building leadership capacity. The programme is intended to build a Wider Leadership Team (WLT) who will focus on collective leadership and is made up of all managers, heads of function (HoF) and directors, and is aimed at equipping UR leaders with the skills and knowhow to lead and support the development of their teams. The programme was expanded in September 2020 to include focused officer and analyst development, which included Project Team Leadership, Emotional intelligence, Communicating Confidently, Beyond Admin, Assertiveness and Public Speaking. The WLT programme also flexed in response to the pandemic delivering sessions such as Remote Leadership; Engaging in Wellbeing, Making your Case in a virtual World; and Supporting Team Resilience. The first stage of the programme concluded during the reporting period and we are currently in the process of procuring a facilitator to deliver the next stage of the development.  Health and wellbeing continued to feature strongly in the reporting period, and was particularly focused on mental wellbeing and ways to connect with staff due to ongoing pandemic. Regular online training delivered an increased volume and scope of staff wellbeing programmes. Winter Wellbeing programme and various in year activities and sessions have been driven by the lockdown and activities are focused on online mental health and achieving work life balance support. We also organised weekly remote Yoga and Pilates groups and various online “coffee breaks” and support groups. One of these focused on new staff, this group continues to meet to support on-boarding staff in the remote environment. In response to feedback from newer colleagues we have also reviewed our induction process and documentation to ensure we engage and support new staff with the challenges they face in the virtual world. Staff continue to avail of employee assistance provider (EAP) “Inspire” and the HR team monitors use of EAP services. During the reporting period, HR carried out specific Display Screen Equipment risk assessments for all staff. Risk assessments for pregnant staff and new or returning mothers also continued, again with a re-focused approach due to Covid-19 and remote working. Adjustments were made to the working environment in some cases where specific requirements were identified. Where appropriate, amendments and reasonable adjustments are also explored for staff returning from sick and long-term sick absence, including referrals to Welfare Support Service and Occupational Health Service. Absence linked to disability or maternity is not counted towards our inefficiency policy and we are looking to NICS and Equality Commission for guidance on how to support employees suffering from long Covid-19, our commitment to the Mental Health Charter, particluarly to promote inclusivity for employees and encourage good mental health in the workplace within the continuing working from home environment.We carry out an annual monitoring review of “personal details” profile of staff members, and include a statement inviting staff who may have acquired a disability, to discuss the issue and any attendant matters confidentially with our HR team.In 2017 our CEO personally endorsed UR’s commitment to mental health by signing World Federation for Mental Health’s Pledge and the Equality Commission’s Mental Health Charter. As part of this commitment we continued to offer “Mindful Manager” training for all managers based on the mental health tool kit during the reporting period and this training is ongoing for new staff and managers. A number of staff signed up to complete the accredited Mental Health First Aid course which aims to train key staff in the workplace to provide initial help to a person who is developing a mental health problem or who is in mental crisis until appropriate professional treatment is received or until the crisis is resolved. We currently have 5 mental health first aiders within the office. This was promoted personally by the first aiders during Covid-19 inviting staff to reach out for their support, a chat or a socially distanced meet up.In 2019 our CEO championed the development of a new Trans Equality Policy recognising the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The policy is aimed at welcoming the contribution made by all staff, including trans colleagues, providing inclusive policies and practical support to enable all staff to fulfil their potential and encourage a diverse range of candidates to apply for roles within UR. All staff training on Diversity and Inclusion (Transgender Policy) took place in January and February 2020, with a further mop up session during the reporting period. This training included a talk by Alexa Moore on Transgender Awareness from Transgender NI. The sessions were fully attended and received positive feedback from staff. In February 2021 our new CEO championed our commitment to becoming a Disability Confident organisation. We promote this on our website and outgoing communications and apply these principles to our recruitment and selection. Our new CEO also supported our registration with Diversity Charter Mark and our application for Bronze accreditation. With the assistance of Diversity Charter Mark and with the outcome and feedback of the accreditation, we plan to commit to a 3-year Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy focusing first on Gender, LGBTQ and Disability. We intend to set up a working group to help us actualise this strategy. During the reporting period, we have launched corporate membership of Women in Business and plan to induce all female staff to the programme in May 2021. We also plan to invite our newer staff (not based on age) to connect with UK Regulators Network (UKRN) Young Professionals Network (YPN), to support them in their induction into a being a “regulator” and future career development.We continue to develop our relationship with Business in the Community (BiTC) and during the reporting period, a new Corporate Social Responsibility Programme was developed focusing on three strands looking after: Our People; Our Environment; and Our Community. However, due to Covid-19 we were unable to engage in planned initiatives such as Time to Read and other volunteering projects within the community which would focus on a number of Section 75 groups. We continue to foster relationships with voluntary, community and environmental groups within the local community as part of BiTC and our ongoing commitment to CSR and hope to continue volunteering in line with Public Health Agency advice. During the reporting period, we have organised initiatives such as staff nominations for our UR Charity and Christmas charities, The Welcome Organisation, Simon Community and Action for Children. Cash for Kids Mission Christmas donation appeal was also posted on the internet for donations. This is a charity close to staff and in normal circumstances a number of staff would usually volunteer their time to the appeal. We have worked with Give As you Earn during the reporting period, promoting the benefits of making charitable donations direct from salaries and now have 12 staff making donations through payroll giving monthly. UR also run a cycle to work scheme allowing staff to purchase bicycles under a repayment mechanism, supporting wellbeing and the environment.  |
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| **2** | Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2020-21 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*). |
|  | The Forward Work Programme is an established plan which has been consulted upon extensively with the people and organisations listed in our Equality Scheme. The mandatory energy Supplier Marketing Code of Practice (MCOP), in operation since June 2014, protects all customers from potential misselling by energy suppliers. It ensures that all customers can take informed and unpressurised decisions regarding which energy supplier to choose. A review of this code is ongoing. MCOP ensures that no customers are subjected to misselling practices from energy companies. The Marketing Codes also specify the following requirements which should have positive impacts on Section 75 groups:* Suppliers will ensure that they provide training on the recognition and treatment of vulnerable consumers;
* Sales agents must not exploit a person’s inexperience, vulnerability, credulity, loyalties or intimidate a consumer in an attempt to restrict their ability to make an informed choice;
* The sales agent must not abuse the trust of vulnerable or inexperienced customers, for example, those who are elderly or those who have special needs. Sales agents should not complete an energy supply contract with customers who are not capable, at the time of the contact, of making an informed decision as to whether or not to enter into the contract.

We are active in ensuring compliance with the MCOP and this is reported to us annually through the annual REMM submission, Statement of Licence Compliance.The Gas (Individual Standards of Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 came into force on 1 April 2014 following extensive consultation. The Regulations afford protection to all consumers including those falling within Section 75 categories. The Regulations set out a level of service required in a number of service areas including;* Response to complaints
* Making and keeping appointments
* Reconnecting gas supply after an incident
* Resolving meter disputes

Where the supply or distribution company fails to meet a prescribed standard they must make a payment to the customer. The Regulations encourage companies to offer a high level of service to customers or to compensate them accordingly.During 2020/21 we have continued to work with the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI), gas suppliers and gas distribution companies to consider how vulnerable customers are treated in the event of a disconnection. In this case, vulnerable customers refer to those who are of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick. We will continue to work with the CCNI as they develop a policy for ensuring vulnerable customers are adequately protected in the event of a disconnection.In 2020/21 we conducted research to facilitate the Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) which set out prescribed service levels which **individua**l consumers can expect from electricity companies, including compensatory payment requirements when the company has failed to adhere to the standards (subject to certain exemptions). This will provide enhanced levels of consumer protection for consumers in Northern Ireland.NISEP continued to provide grant funding for energy efficiency schemes for domestic and non-domestic properties. 80% of the funding available each year is ring-fenced for schemes that target vulnerable households. In 2018-19, over £7m was divided between 10 different schemes providing a mixture of heating systems, loft and cavity wall insulation and other energy efficiency measures to vulnerable households. Each scheme defined its own vulnerability criteria but the main criterion used to assess eligibility for the schemes was low-income. Whilst not specifically focusing on Section 75 groups, the schemes benefit all groups within the population at risk of fuel poverty.As part of the NISEP review, an equality screening exercise took place in September 2019. The screening exercise highlighted that NISEP has a positive impact on specific section 75 groups, including older people, children, people from BAME backgrounds and people living with disabilities.Licence modifications required to implement the customer protection requirements of the EU Third Energy Package (IME3) came into effect during 2014-15. Since the modifications came into effect, we have worked closely with licencees to ensure compliance with them and have continued to monitor their policies, procedures and practices to ensure ongoing compliance (for example approved new Codes of Practice for all suppliers). Annual monitoring of all supplier licence conditions, including the documents pursuant to the licence conditions, is done through the annual REMM framework (Statement of Licence Compliance).Electricity, as well as gas supply and distribution licences, contain a condition regarding services that must be provided for specific customer groups including customers who are of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick and customers who are blind, partially sighted, deaf or hearing–impaired. Such services include a password scheme to identify company staff, the provision of bills and information in accessible formats, repositioning of pre-payment meters free of charge, providing bills to a nominated carer and making arrangements to avoid deprivation of adequate heating and cooking facilities where the conveyance of gas has been disconnected. We oversee compliance with licence conditions on an ongoing basis. Our major network price controls continue to build on the widely appreciated consumer research which has underpinned our price controls for NI Water. The collaborative partnership model we have developed locally continues to deliver for the consumer, especially where expertise is pooled across companies, this office, CCNI and associated government departments.For water, our collaborative group remains the Consumer Engagement Oversight Group (CEOG). This is supported by a consumer measures and satisfaction working group (CM/SAT) which considers opportunities to introduce consumer measures focused on ‘actionable data’ to help target improvements for the customer experience. CEOG and CM/SAT continued to provide input to our PC21 price control process through consideration of consumer engagement and consumer metrics. CM/SAT reviewed company performance against the new metrics, definitions and customer satisfaction survey, which were introduced in the 2016/17 Annual Information Return (AIR17), and used this to inform decisions on the consumer metrics and targets that should be included in our final determination for monitoring performance during PC21. In addition to the consumer engagement undertaken by CEOG for PC21, we continued to consult principal stakeholders through an established structure of formal working groups. These stakeholder groups considered the drinking water quality, environmental quality and social policy priorities for the price control period and helped define the associated PC21 objectives and targets. Feedback from other stakeholder groups, business customers and the broader domestic customer base on our PC21 price control decisions was obtained through consultation on our draft determination, which closed on 16 December 2020, the screening report will be included in the next reporting period. The consultation responses are published on our website and an Annex summarising how we took account of the comments received was included in our final determination. For the RP6 price control of NIE Networks, both the company business plan and our determination were underpinned by rigorous consumer research and engagement, commissioned by the Consumer Engagement Advisory Panel (CEAP) using Perceptive Insight Market Research, a local research house with academic input from Queen’s University, Belfast. The work of the CEAP has continued and to date, NIE Networks has delivered on the promise to consumers to continually engage. This has included both continuing surveys of NIE Networks’ consumer base as well as the introduction of stakeholder workshops across the province. CEAP are currently reviewing their Terms of Reference to ensure a broader emphasis on consumer issues is available to inform their next price control RP7, upon which parties will begin development during 2021.For the local gas distribution network (GDN) companies we expect the same continuous engagement and have begun the process of re-constituting the Consumer Engagement Working Group (CEWG) by focusing upon the needs of their next price control at GD23 into account, within new Terms of Reference for the CEWG. This process has begun on the back of a successful cross-sector workshop which took place earlier 2020, including both CEWG for gas and the CEAP for electricity members.Regardless of whether CEAG, CEOG or CEAP, our collaborative partnership group’s modus operandi includes examination of the impacts of decisions upon Section 75 groups as well as consideration of how we might protect vulnerable consumers. |
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| **3** | Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)* |
|  | [x]  | Yes | [ ]  | No (go to Q.4) | [ ]  | Not applicable (go to Q.4) |
|  | Please provide any details and examples: |
|  | Covid-19 Response: Arrangements while Queens House (QH) is closed for normal working and recovery plan to return to the office. |
|  |  |
| **3a** | With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?  |
|  | Please provide any details and examples: |
|  | The plan sets out arrangements and initial guidance that would apply during and after any return to work in QH for ensuring the safety of staff and visitors entering QH following a decision taken by the UR’s Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to temporarily close QH to all but essential staff on 24 March 2020.QH has remained accessible to allow the distribution of IT and office equipment and associated support and in order for essential maintenance to be undertaken.At the time of writing, the Northern Ireland Executive (NIEx) advice remains to work from home wherever possible. The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Recovery Plan, whilst recognising that there may be an increase in the number of people needing access to workplaces, continues to stipulate that all those who can work from home should do so. This approach is reflected in advice provided by the Department of Finance. It has also been possible to review the approach adopted, and guidance issued, by permanent secretaries in key executive departments and agencies including DfE, DHSSPS and DE. These all advocate a default position of working from home. Initial consideration during the screening phase identified the potential for an adverse impact across a number of section 75 groups. |
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| **Section 75 Category** | **Details of Policy Impact** | **Level of Impact?** **Minor/Major/None** |
| **Religious belief** | Could adversely impact | Minor |
| **Political opinion**  | Unlikely to adversely impact | None |
| **Racial / ethnic group**  | Could adversely impact | Major |
| **Age** | Could adversely impact | Major |
| **Marital status**  | Could adversely impact  | Major |
| **Sexual orientation** | Could adversely impact | Major |
| **Men and women generally**  | Could adversely impact | Major |
| **Disability** | Could adversely impact | Major |
| **Dependants**  | Could adversely impact | Major |

 |
| **3b** | What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? *(tick all that apply)* |
|  | [x]  | As a result of the organisation’s screening of a policy *(please give details):* |
|  | Screening during the development of this guidance identified a potentially adverse impact across a number of 75 groups and immediate EQIA was undertaken in tandem with the policy development. The impact on groups will be considered and reflected in planning, policy and in one to one considerations, with any mitigating actions impacting positively on good relations. |
|  | As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise *(please give details):* |
|  |  |
| [x]  | As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact *(please give details):* |
|  | An EQIA was carried out to consider the impact of Covid-19, home working and plans to return to the office environment. There was evidence to suggest that all of these factors have a potential to have an adverse effect on a number of protected groups and requires further consideration and actions to reduce negative and increase positive impact. |
| [ ]  | As a result of changes to access to information and services *(please specify and give details)*:  |
|  |       |
|  | [ ]  | Other *(please specify and give details)*:  |
|  |  |  |
| **Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures**  |
| **Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)** |
| **4** | Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)* |
|  | [x]  | Yes, organisation wide |
| [ ]  | Yes, some departments/jobs |
| [ ]  | No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment |
| [x]  | No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done |
| [ ]  | Not applicable |
|  | Please provide any details and examples: |
|  | Employee's job descriptions and personal performance plans reflect their contributions to the discharge of the Section 75 statutory duties and implementation of the equality scheme where relevant. The personal performance plans are subject to appraisal in the annual and mid-year performance review. During the reporting period UR values have been included into the criteria for person specifications in all recruitment going forward. The recruitment of the new CEO in June 2020, included a significant weighting on testing candidates alignment to UR mission, vision and values. |
|  |  |
| **5** | Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)* |
|  | [x]  | Yes, organisation wide |
| [ ]  | Yes, some departments/jobs |
| [ ]  | No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment |
| [ ]  | No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done |
| [ ]  | Not applicable |
|  | Please provide any details and examples: |
|  | The personal performance plans are subject to appraisal in the annual and mid-year performance review. Where Section 75 statutory duties are related to jobs this is reflected in individual performance plans. During the reporting period a review of the performance management documentation took place, resulting in new elements developed to include new “corporate” objectives aligned to UR values; an employee “self assessment” linked to personal development and focusing on UR values and statutory obligations, such as section 75. This format will be used for performance review in April 2021 onwards. |
|  |
|  | In the 2020-21 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? *(tick all that apply)* |
|  | [ ]  | Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan  |
| [ ]  | Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning |
| [x]  | Yes, in some departments/jobs |
| [x]  | No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation’s ongoing corporate plan |
| [ ]  | No, the organisation’s planning cycle does not coincide with this 2015-16 report |
| [ ]  | Not applicable |
|  | Please provide any details and examples: |
|  | Our Corporate Strategy 2019-2024 placed consumers at the centre of our work and includes an overarching purpose to protect and empower all consumers. The strategy includes a strategic objective: “promoting markets that deliver effective competition, informed choice and fair outcomes”. A key aspect of this is to protect vulnerable consumers, such as through our Consumer Protection Programme. We are also committed to engaging with consumers more as part of our work. Our Corporate Strategy identifies key success measures related to customer satisfaction. Specific objectives and measurements relating to Section 75 statutory duties URP Plan 2018-2021. This continues in our current plan being developed 2021-24 focusing strongly on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and UR values which include “To be a best practice regulator, transparent, consistent, proportionate, accountable and targeted, which includes the fulfilment of UR's duties under Section 75 and ensuring that equality underpins, and is mainstreamed through, all our work. HR worked closely with staff and SMT to develop and refresh the UR Mission, Vision and Values and Behaviours (MVVB). From this a set of UR behaviours were developed of which best practice and equitable behaviour was key. During 2020/2021 we also consulted on our Forward Work Programme for 2021/2022. As well as considering all written responses, we held an online stakeholder workshop to ensure the programme took into account the priorities and key issues of our stakeholders. During 2014 an equal pay review was carried out independently by the NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) on behalf of UR to identify whether there is a significant difference between males and females and between Protestants and Catholics in terms of basic salary. Following on from the work carried out on the equal pay review, and in accordance with advice received from the Departmental Solicitor’s Office (DSO), NISRA completed a modelling exercise to develop a revised pay system. We worked closely with the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) and non-union staff representatives to develop options and agree the introduction of a system of pay progression with the intention to remove the inequalities identified in the pay review in 2014. The system of pay progression was agreed for three years. To establish the extent to which the revised pay system was successful in removing inequalities, further comparative analysis was carried out by NISRA in February 2017 which revealed that the number and extent of pay disparities has decreased. Management consulted with NIPSA on the findings at the Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee (JNCC) meeting in April 2017 and with further advice from DSO agreed a further system of pay progression was agreed in February 2018 until March 2020. A commitment was given for NISRA to re-run the age analysis in 2018/19 to assess the extent to which age related gaps have been closed. This analysis was undertaken and shared with NIPSA colleagues in August 2019, again no inequalities were identified and any gaps could be explained by starting salary or length of service. We are in the process of consulting with NIPSA colleagues to agree a pay deal for years 2020/21 and 2021/22. Following this, a further full equal pay review will be carried out by NISRA to allow negotiations to begin on the 2022/23 pay award and to ensure a system of pay is in place which aims to prevent any new significant equality differences emerging. |
|  |  |
| **Equality action plans/measures**  |
| **7** | Within the 2020-21reporting period, please indicate the **number** of: |
|  | Actions completed: | 7 | Actions ongoing: | 7 | Actions to commence: |       |
|  | Please provide any details and examples (*in addition to question 2*): |
|  | Continuing to Develop as an Organisation: during 2018 a review of our Corporate Strategy was complete and our new corporate strategy for 2019-24 was published at the end of March 2019. This will continue to be an on ongoing action. |
|  |  |
| **8** | Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2020-21 reporting period *(points not identified in an appended plan)*: |
|  | Please see updated action plan 2018-23. |
|  |  |
| **9** | In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2020-21 reporting period, the following have been identified: *(tick all that apply)* |
|  | [x]  | Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality |
| [ ]  | Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way |
| [ ]  | Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities |
| [ ]  | Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed |
|  |  |
| **Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)** |
| **10** | Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: *(tick one box only)* |
|  | [x]  | All the time | [ ]  | Sometimes | [ ]  | Never |
|  |  |
| **11** | Please provide any **details and examples** **of good practice** in consultation during the 2020-21 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations: |
|  | As part of our commitment to good practice in consultation, we proactively engage with CCNI in respect of the most appropriate ways of engaging with consumers. We seek appropriate and proportionate approaches to impact assessments in our consultation documentation and seek to reflect this in our template document. We also review the operation of our approach to consultation against our consultation guide.We continue to develop relationships and consult with other organisations including the Equality Commission, Disability Action, Age Sector Platform, the Commissioner for Older People, Save the Children, Christians Against Poverty and mainstream political parties. Our consultations are intended to seek the views of those directly affected by the subject matter or policy, regulated utilities, the Equality Commission, representative groups of Section 75 categories, other public authorities, voluntary and community groups, our staff and recognised trade union (NIPSA) and such other groups who have a legitimate interest whether or not they have a direct economic or personal interest.Initially all consultees within the UR Equality Scheme, as a matter of course, will be notified (by email or post) of the matter or policy being consulted upon to ensure they are aware of all consultations. Thereafter, to ensure the most effective use of our and our consultees’ resources, we will take a targeted approach to consultation for those consultees that may have a particular interest in the matter or policy being consulted on and to whom the matter or policy is of particular relevance. This may include, for example, regional or local consultations, sectoral or thematic consultation etc. We consider the accessibility and format of every method of consultation we use in order to remove barriers to the consultation process. Following the redevelopment of our website in 2016/2017, we continue to promote easier access to information and improve the ease of use for all stakeholders. We are also continuing to take steps to improve the accessibility of our website by ensuring the web news blurb is consumer friendly and is in plain English. Within the website, there is a dedicated section for equality where we continue to publish all of our Section 75 information and reports.Specific consideration was given as to how best to communicate with children and young people, people with disabilities (in particular people with learning disabilities) and minority ethnic communities.Information can be made available, on request, in alternative formats, in a timely manner. This message is displayed on our website news items. Requests for alternative formats will be responded to usually within three working days and we will ensure that such consultees have equal time to respond.Specific training is provided to those facilitating consultations to ensure that they have the necessary skills to communicate effectively with consultees.Following the May 2016 Assembly elections, and as stipulated under the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) of 20 November 2015, a maximum 8-week consultation period took effect for ongoing consultations.In addition the FSA included ‘Eight Steps to Good Practice in Public Consultation-Engagement’. The FSA’s call for “early and continuous engagement”, “consider[ation] of the timing, duration and cost”, “manage[ment] of stakeholders’ expectations” and “share[d] best practice” add further support to UR’s expectation for regulated utilities, especially the network monopolies, to continuously engage with consumers and stakeholders. Such informed conversations should not be limited to each price control published by us every five years or more. Furthermore, our collaborative partnership model of consumer research with consumer engagement working groups which pool resources across government/regulator, consumer representative, public and private sectors ensures we share best practice, to help deliver valuable research and insight into consumer priorities. Where, under the exceptional circumstances beyond our control, we must implement a policy immediately we may consult after implementation of the policy in order to ensure that any impacts are still considered.If a consultation exercise is to take place over a period when consultees are less able to respond, for example over the summer or Christmas break, or if the policy under consideration is particularly complex, we will give consideration to the feasibility of allowing a longer period for the consultation.We are conscious of the fact that affected individuals and representative groups may have different needs. We take appropriate measures to ensure full participation in any meetings that are held. We consider, for example, the time of day, appropriateness of venue and in particular whether or not it can be accessed by those with disabilities, how the meeting is to be conducted, the use of appropriate language, whether a signer and/or interpreter is necessary, and whether the provision of childcare and support for other carers is required.We continue to engage representative bodies of the Section 75 categories through official publications, website, press releases and reports and when consulting on business projects. We endeavour to keep consultation lists up to date with personnel or organisational changes. We do this via regular news updates and our CEO and/or directors regularly carry out briefings with stakeholders on key issues and use of workshops, question and answer sessions and consultations.Directorates continue to consult and engage with stakeholders by including representatives of vulnerable groups including S75 groups, to workshops or meetings on specific social action issues as appropriate. Our Chief Executive continues to meet with key consumer, political and business stakeholders and we hold a programme of consumer panel meetings with representatives of consumer and business bodies.  Stakeholders have the opportunity to discuss how our work impacts on all consumers with a focus on the most vulnerable. There is representation at a senior level from CCNI, National Energy Action, Advice NI, Commissioner for Older People NI and Christians Against Poverty.  In the context of consulting internally, we use team meetings, staff working groups, CEO open meetings, all staff emails, notice boards, URP updates and the intranet to provide information for internal consultation. The URP group continues to meet to oversee and support the ongoing delivery of the URP, including practical involvement in the delivery of key URP actions and providing a sounding board for URP plan activities, as well as acting as an advocate/champion for the URP plan within their directorate and being a channel of communication on the activities to and from directorates.During the reporting period, planning commenced in response to Covid-19 with arrangements while Queens House was closed for normal working and a recovery plan to return to the office. As part of that process staff were consulted via two online staff surveys; Trade Union Side were consulted via JNCC; and a Health and Safety Committee made up of trade union and management representatives from across the organization engaged in consultation on behalf of staff. A detailed Risk Assessment and EQIA has been carried out in order to plan a safe return to work Queens House.  |
|  |  |
| **12** | In the 2020-21 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used by consultees**: *(tick all that apply)* |
|  | [x]  | Face to face meetings |
| [x]  | Focus groups |
| [x]  | Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing |
| [x]  | Questionnaires |
| [x]  | Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation |
| [x]  | Internet discussions |
| [x]  | Telephone consultations |
| [x]  | Other *(please specify)*: Workshops |
|  | Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees’ membership of particular Section 75 categories: |
|  | This list is not exhaustive and we may develop other additional methods of consultation more appropriate to key stakeholders and the matter being consulted upon. Consultation with all relevant stakeholders will begin as early as possible. We will engage with affected individuals and representative groups to identify how best to consult or engage with them. We will ask our consultees what their preferred consultation methods are and will give consideration to these. |
|  |  |
| **13** | Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)* |
|  | [x]  | Yes | [ ]  | No  | [ ]  | Not applicable  |
|  | Please provide any details and examples: |
|  | See 12 above. |
|  |  |
| **14** | Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)* |
|  | [x]  | Yes | [ ]  | No | [ ]  | Not applicable – no commitment to review |
|  |  |
| **Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)** During the review period we have updated the technical specification of our website to meet accessibility requirements. Our website has also been audited and an accessibility  statement has been published which sets out our intention to further enhance the website’s accessibility over the next year. Screening templates, our equality scheme and framework are uploaded to the equality section and this archive is regularly maintained.  |
| **15** | Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year (*as recorded in screening reports*): |
|  | 5 |  |
|  |  |
| **16** | Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2020-21: |
|  | 1 | Policy consultations conducted with **screening** assessment presented.  |
| 0 | Policy consultations conducted **with an** **equality impact assessment** (EQIA) presented. |
| 1 | Consultations for an **EQIA** alone. |
|  |  |
| **17** |  Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties: |
|  | Feedback from other stakeholder groups, business customers and the broader domestic customer base on our PC21 price control decisions was obtained through consultation on our draft determination, which closed on 16 December 2020, the screening report will be included in the next reporting period. The consultation responses are published on our website and an Annex summarising how we took account of the comments received was included in our final determination.In in July 2020 an EQIA was carried out to assist in development of plans to respond to Covid-19 with arrangements while Queens House was closed for normal working and a recovery plan to return to the office was being developed. As part of that process staff were consulted via two online staff surveys open to all employees; Trade Union Side were consulted via JNCC and the Health and Safety Committee (H&SC) were also consulted. The H&SC is made up of trade union and management representatives from across the organization and from a mixed gender and community background. A detailed Risk Assessment and EQIA has been carried out in order to plan a safe return to work Queens House. The Covid-19 Working at Home/return to office arrangements EQIA can be found at Annex A. At the time of writing there has been no indication of when a return to the office is likely. When we are in a position to consider a return with timeframes attached, there will be a review of the risk assessment and EQIA. Details of other consultations are listed at Q11 above.  |
| **18** | Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? *(tick one box only)* |
|  | [ ]  | Yes | [x]  | No concerns were raised  | [ ]  | No  | [ ]  | Not applicable  |
|  | Please provide any details and examples: |
|  |  |
| **Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)** |
| **19** | Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)* |
|  | [x]  | Yes | [ ]  | No | [ ]  | Not applicable |
|  | Please provide any details and examples: |
| One EQIA will be published on our equality section of the internet in line with our annual update.**Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)** |
| **20** | From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)* |
|  | [ ]  | Yes | [x]  | No, already taken place  |
| [ ]  | No, scheduled to take place at a later date | [ ]  | Not applicable  |
|  | Please provide any details: |
|  | An informal review of the Equality Scheme, including monitoring arrangements takes place in June/July each year, a formal review of the Disability Action Plan (DAP) took place in January 2018 and a new Equality Scheme and DAP is now in place for 2018-23. |
|  |  |
| **21** | In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? *(tick one box only)* |
|  | [ ]  | Yes | [x]  | No  | [ ]  | Not applicable  |
|  | Please provide any details and examples: |
|  |       |
|  |  |
| **22** | Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2018-19 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed: |
|  | N/A |
| **23** | Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development: |
|  | N/A |
|  |  |
| **Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)** |
| **24** | Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2020-21, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme. |
|  | Staff have received ongoing training in corporate and individual responsibility to ensure compliance with Section 75 issues with a training sessions being delivered in advance of any recruitment exercise for new panel members, including training for three Board members in preparation for our CEO recruitment in June 2020. HR participate in every recruitment exercise as a panel member or in an advisory capacity. This training covers persons of different religious belief; persons of different political opinion; persons of different racial groups; persons of different age; persons with different marital status; persons of different sexual orientation; men and women generally; persons with and without disability; and persons with and without dependants. Training also covers equality, diversity and unconscious bias. We undertake an annual individual review of all employees, where the key aspects of their performance and effectiveness are assessed. In addition to goals and objectives being established for the forthcoming year, training needs are reviewed and form part of the annual Learning and Development Plan. Directorates also undertake regular reviews of performance against targets where variances are highlighted, which are then addressed. More specific training of staff, in how they contribute to the values and responsibilities required under Section 75 carried out during the year, was as follows:* Employment Law updates – throughout the year;
* Equality Commission training - throughout the year;
* Equality Scheme, Action Plan and Equal Opportunities/Dignity at Work Policy included in induction for new staff;
* Members of the Consumer Protection branch attended seminars and workshops throughout the year in relation to fuel poverty and energy efficiency issues;
* Induction and ongoing staff training in equality legislation for all staff;
* Equality, diversity and selection training for staff sitting on recruitment and selection panels;
* Deaf awareness briefing and tips communicating remotely was delivered for all staff and by Action On Hearing Loss and included in the induction for new staff;
* Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (Transgender Policy) training was delivered for all staff in January, February and June 2020;
* Equality screening training was arranged for key staff to ensure all staff are adequately trained and competent in the screening process outlined in UR’s Equality Scheme (s75). Paul Oaks from the Equality Commission delivered refresher Section 75 and screening training in December 2020;
* Equality and Section 75 training is provided to all staff via online training from NICS Centre of Applied Learning (CAL);
* Mandatory training for staff who would sit on evaluation panels for Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) administered tenders;
* Mandatory training for all staff on procurement, GDPR and Data Protection;
* Mindful Manager Training was delivered in 2018/19 and for 2019/20 with the Tool Kit available on the intranet;
* Level 3 Award in Energy Awareness NEA City & Guilds, has been offered to all staff, with 8 staff currently studying towards their accreditation;
* Neurodiverstiy training was rolled out with great success with a commitment to train all staff;
* A staff member with a neurodiverse condition shared their experience of wellbeing support received from UR; and encouraged staff to attend the neurodiversity training;
* Various resilience and mental health training is ongoing via Inspire, Action Mental Health and a selection of online courses from (CAL).
 |
|  |  |
| **25** | Please provide any examples of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives: |
|  | General awareness training is provided for all staff and board members on Section 75 and disability issues including, anti-discrimination legislation, Section 75 background and responsibilities and details on disability action plans commences at induction. All staff are trained and aware of the provisions of Section 75, UR's equality scheme commitments, the issues likely to affect people across the range of categories and understand their role in implementing the scheme.All staff were trained in policy screening and are now aware of the process and UR duties in this area. Refresher training has been provided via CAL and is ongoing. Key staff are confident to, and competent in, the screening process in line with UR's Equality Scheme and Paul Oaks from the Equality Commission delivered training during the reporting period. Two staff and three Board members have been trained as new recruitment panel members during reporting period and have successfully recruited a number of UR staff including a new CEO. All staff who have been inducted have passed their 6 month probationary period in the reporting period.Staff sitting on tender evaluation panels receive in house and, as appropriate, CAL tender evaluation training and understand the importance of assessing each tender submission in an equitable, open and transparent manner using the published specification and award criteria and attend regular procurement training. A short CAL course is now also used by staff as a refresher on the EtendersNI process.On an ongoing basis members of the Consumer Protection Branch attend fuel poverty/energy efficiency seminars and workshops, giving them better understanding of the issues and barriers encountered by related Section 75 groups. |
| **Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)** |
| **26** | Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2020-21, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**: |
|  | Section 75 continues to be annual agenda item for our Audit and Risk Committee. The Board also receives reports on performance against section 75 objectives through approval of this progress report. During the reporting period we continued to explain our duties and responsibilities and consulted with groups representing those with disabilities in the course of Section 75 processes.We fully comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and the associated Codes of Practice within our offices. We ensure access requirements are met for members of the public with disabilities to take part in public consultation through provision of documents in alternative formats on request.The redevelopment of our website included looking at how we consult and was aimed at improving the accessibility of our documents and information. The website is consumer-facing and promotes access to information and improves the ease of use for all stakeholders. This includes an equality section detailing the new equality scheme, revised Disability Action Plan and equality progress reports. Accessibility to all is a priority for us and is clearly demonstrated by the website having been assessed against, and as compliant with, the W3C ‘AA’ standard. We can also provide alternative formats for all of our publications on request. Equality consultation has been incorporated within the development of our business approach with particular focus on employment matters, procurement, communications and social and environmental issues. Employment opportunities in the office are based on experience rather than minimum academic qualifications and all application forms and interviews are competency based and applicants with disabilities are invited to tell us about reasonable adjustments they require.A staff member with hearing loss assisted in production of a deaf awareness brief for inclusion in staff induction which includes practical guidance on deaf awareness and communicating effectively. We continue to include this in our induction for new staff.  |
|  |  |
| **Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)** |
| **27** | How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2020-21? |
|  | Insert number here:  | 0 |  |
|  | Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome: |
|  |       |

|  |
| --- |
| **Section 3: Looking Forward** |
| **28** | Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review: |
|  | A review was carried out by the HR Manager each summer and a formal 5 year review was carried out in early 2018. The updated Equality Scheme 2018-23 was opened to a 4 week consultation before approval by Risk and Audit Committee in September 2018 and is available on the UR website. |
|  |  |
| **29** | Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)* |
|  | None. |
|  |  |
| **30** | In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next (2020-21) reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)* |
|  | [ ]  | Employment |
| [ ]  | Goods, facilities and services |
| [ ]  | Legislative changes |
| [ ]  | Organisational changes/ new functions |
| [x]  | Nothing specific, more of the same |
| [ ]  | Other (please state):  |

**PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans**

|  |
| --- |
| **1. Number of action measures** for this **reporting period** that have been: |
| **6** |  |  |  | **3** |  |  |  | **0** |  |  |  |
| Fully achieved | Partially achieved | Not achieved |

2. Please outline below details on all **actions that have been fully achieved** in the reporting period.

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Level | Public Life Action Measures | Outputs[[2]](#endnote-2) | Outcomes / Impact[[3]](#endnote-3) |
| National[[4]](#endnote-4) |       |       |       |
| Regional[[5]](#endnote-5) |       |       |       |
| Local[[6]](#endnote-6) | We will continue to develop staff and specifically board awareness workshops and training on equality and disability legislation, particularly for recruitment panels and staff dealing with consultation papers. | Promoting positive attitudes amongst staff and board members towards disabled people. | Improvement in attitude, more effective communication. |

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Training Action Measures | Outputs | Outcome / Impact |
| 1 | Equality, diversity and selection training for staff sitting on recruitment and selection panels. | Training sessions being delivered in advance of any recruitment exercise for new panel members, including new staff panel members in equality, diversity and selection and training for three Board members and a guest panel member in preparation for our CEO recruitment in June 2020. | Panel members are adequately trained and competent in the equality and recruitment process outlined in UR’s Recruitment Policy and in line with equality legislation and best practice. |
| 2 | All staff trained equality and diversity. | HR and new key staff have attended Equality Commission training in 2020/21. Equality awareness is included in the induction for new staff. Section 75 and policy screening training was complete with all key staff in February 2016, and refresher training was carried out by Equality Commission in 2020. All staff training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (Transgender Policy) was carried out in 2020 and Equality and Section 75 Screening training is provided via NICs CAL. | All staff are aware of the provisions of Section 75, UR's equality scheme commitments, diversity in the work place and the issues likely to affect people across the range of categories and understand their role in promoting equality. |
|  |       |       |       |

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Communications Action Measures | Outputs | Outcome / Impact  |
| 1 | HR regularly reviews policies and discusses issues relating to Section 75 and disability discrimination as they arise with union representatives and communicated to staff. | Communicating and updating staff. A new Transgender policy has been developed and consulted on at JNCC. Training was complete all staff on inclusion and diversity to communicate the recently developed policy. Covid-19 Working at Home/return to office arrangements plans and guidance were consulted on and subject to an EQIA. | Forum to discuss with staff relevant issues on a timely basis. |
| 2 | Commissioning consultation documents to representative groups. | Developing relationships for feedback. Ongoing. | Consideration of applying feedback. |
| 3 | Developing relationships with other public authorities, voluntary & community sector groups and mainstream political parties. | Promoting good relations and positive attitudes. Ongoing. | Change of attitude and consideration of moving towards all-inclusive policies and procedures. |
| 4 | Review of accessibility of communications. | Promoting good relations and positive attitudes. Introduction of Twitter feed during 2018 to promote greater access to information about the UR. We have commenced a peer review of our communications which will look at the accessibility of our publications. | Change of attitude and consideration of moving towards all-inclusive policies and procedures. Improved accessibility. |
| 5 | Produce accessible corporate documents. | Promoting clarity in communication and provision of the clearest possible information. Ensuring documentation and web uploads such as the web news blurb is consumer friendly and is in plain English.  | More engaging information for all consumers. |
| 6 | Website and intranet improvements plans to improve accessibility. | Both online channels, website and intranet, have been updated to promote ease of access and better engagement.  During the review period we have updated the technical specification of our website to meet accessibility requirements. Our website has also been audited and an accessibility statement has been published which sets out our intention to further enhance the website’s accessibility over the next year. | Inclusive approach from staff in relation to accessibility of information. |
| 7 | Ongoing website and intranet development and maintenance | Screening templates, our equality scheme and framework were uploaded to the equality section and this archive is regularly maintained. During the review period we have updated the technical specification of our intranet to meet accessibility requirements and this is currently in development. | More engaging information for all consumers. |

2 (d) What action measures were achieved to ‘**encourage others’** to promote the two duties:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Encourage others Action Measures | Outputs | Outcome / Impact  |
| 1 |       |       |       |
| 2 |       |       |       |
|  |       |       |       |

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures) | Outputs | Outcomes / Impact  |
| 1 |       |       |       |
| 2 |       |       |       |
|  |       |       |       |

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Action Measures partly achieved | Milestones[[7]](#endnote-7) / Outputs  | Outcomes/Impacts | Reasons not fully achieved |
|  |  |  |  |   |
|  |       |       |       |       |
|  |       |       |       |       |

4. Please outline what action measures **have not been achieved** and the reasons why.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Action Measures not met | Reasons |
| 1 |       |       |
| 2 |       |       |
|  |       |       |

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

Evaluation of training provided

(b) Quantitative

Receipt of Monitoring Questionnaires for directly employed staff

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

* made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
* taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

  No

If yes please outline below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Revised/Additional Action Measures | Performance Indicator | Timescale |
| 1 |       |       |       |
| 2 |       |       |       |
| 3 |       |       |       |
| 4 |       |       |       |
| 5 |       |       |       |

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation’s annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

1. This requirement is not applicable for the Marketing Code of Practice, the Codes of Practice for Energy Theft or the Billing Code of Practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. **National** : Situations where people can influence policy at a high impact level e.g. Public Appointments [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. **Regional**: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. **Local :** Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. **Milestones** – Please outline what part progress has been made towards the particular measures; even if full output or outcomes/ impact have not been achieved. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)