**EQUALITY and DIVERSITY STEERING GROUP (EDSG)**

**Note of inaugural meeting**

**Thursday 01 March 2018 at 10.00 am**

**Room 229 Dundonald House**

**Attendees:**

Denis McMahon (Chair) Brian Doherty (via VC) Perpetua McNamee (via VC)

Robert Huey Norman Fulton Graham Wilkinson David Small

Collette McMaster Dave Foster Helen Anderson Malcolm Beatty

Phillip Gilmore Alison Wise Angela McAllister Russell McCurry

**Apologies:**

Colin Lewis Alistair Carson Colin Hart Pauline Keegan

David Reid Catherine McCallum Paul McGurnaghan Jackie Robinson

John Speers Seamus McErlean

**Presentations by:**

Louise Warde-Hunter (DfC) Eileen Lavery (ECNI)

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

The Permanent Secretary (Denis McMahon) welcomed everyone to the meeting and emphasised the importance of equality and diversity as core business issues. .

1. **Gender Presentation (Louise Warde-Hunter DfC)**

Louise in her role as NICS Gender Champion, introduced the gender presentation which focused on gender representation within the NICS particularly at senior level and potential barriers to progression faced by some women. She emphasised NICS’s commitment to equality and diversity within its workforce and referred to the recent establishment of a Women’s mentoring circle now in its second cohort which has attracted participation from 40% of G6 and G7 females within the NICS.

Louise referenced a report by Professor Joan Ballantine Ulster University and other academics on “An investigation of gender equality issues at Executive level of the Northern Ireland Public Sector” which presents findings from a study of current and aspiring Executives’ perceptions. The report makes a number of strategic recommendations for the public sector including establishing and monitoring progress toward measurable targets on the achievement of equal participation of men and women at executive level.

Louise also referenced NISRA statistics on gender representation within NICS. Louise went on to inform the group that the Head of Service, David Sterling was launching the NICS Gender Action Plan at an event to acknowledge International Women’s day on 9th March.

A question and answer and brief discussion session then developed focusing primarily on how DAERA could best respond to the Gender Action Plan. The Permanent Secretary asked Helen and Perpetua to consider the Gender Action Plan and gender issues from a Head of Profession perspective and Angela McAllister agreed to assist with this from an equality / diversity perspective.

**ACTION**: Helen, Angela to bring forward a short paper on the NICS Gender Action Plan. Draft to be completed by 20th April following discussions with relevant G5s.

Action completed.

1. **Current Equality Issues: Eileen Lavery, Equality Commission NI (ECNI)**

Eileen Lavery, Head of Advice, Policy and Investigation at ECNI gave an overview of current strategic equality issues. She provided examples of recent approaches to ECNI for advice or legal assistance which focused mainly on access to services and potential discrimination faced by individuals on the grounds of their disability, race or sexual orientation.

In terms of advice to public authorities, Eileen advised on early engagement with S75 representative groups at the onset of the policy development process and throughout the policy development cycle and the need to focus on meaningful, achievable equality action plans. She added that Departments should take the opportunity to showcase positive examples of good practice in delivering equality.

Eileen acknowledged the good set of data provided by NISRA to support equality considerations but stressed that there was still gaps in data available and that this needed to improve.

1. **Action Points from ESG meeting held on 22 November 2017**

All action points were either completed or on-going.

1. **EDSG Terms of Reference**

The EDSG Terms of Reference were noted and agreed in principle.

1. **Proposed date for next EDSG meeting – 28 August 2018**

Equality Unit will confirm the date of the next meeting.

1. **AOB**

No other business or issues were raised.