



ps.ministers
18/04/2001 10:40

Please respond to ps.ministers@ofmdfmni.gov.uk

Sent by: Laureen Meharg

To: patricia.mcauley@ofmdfmni.gov.uk
cc: private.office@doeni.gov.uk, gerry.loughran@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, mary.condron@doeni.gov.uk, pamela.ferguson@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, geraldine.mcgurk@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, sheila.bradfield@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, mary.bunting@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, linda.johnston@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, john.mckervill@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, anne.rainey@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, pamela.stewart@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, jenny.conway@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, pamela.stewart@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, gail.houston@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, valerie.parkinson@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, gail.houston@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, mark.lamour@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, colin.ross@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, dara.cosgrove@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, ann.rogers@ofmdfmni.gov.uk

Subject: Invitation INV/233/2001

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

INVITATION - URGENT

Reference: INV/233/2001
Invitation From: Paul Butler

Subject: INV/233/01 - letter to FM and DFM re flags and emblems displayed at local government buildings

Referred To: MRS MCAULEY

Date Referred: 18/04/2001

ACTION REQUIRED

Please provide advice and draft reply for signature by Minister.
To be with Private Office not later than 25/04/2001.

Copied To For Input:
PS/Mr Foster

Please forward all inputs to MRS MCAULEY not later than 23/04/2001..

Laureen Meharg
Private Office

Parliament Buildings Tel:- 028 9052 1387

Copied To For Information:
PS/Mr Loughran
PS/PERM.SEC. (DOE)
Mr Haire
Mr McCusker
Mrs Bunting
Mr May
Mr McKervill

Mr Lavery
Mr Kerr
Dr Gudgin
Mr Campbell
Mr Larkin
Mr Logue
Mr Barrington
Mr Larmour
Mr Ross
Mrs Cosgrove
Miss A Rogers

LISBURN BOROUGH COUNCIL

St Paul's Cathedral, Lisburn, Co. Down, BT28 1AB

St Paul's Cathedral, Lisburn, Co. Down, BT28 1AB

Tel: 01176 1 1237 Fax: 01176 1 1237

OFMDFM
PRIVATE OFFICE

12 APR 2001

RECEIVED

RE: FLAGS AND EMBLEMS DISPLAYED AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

Dear Sir,

I would like to raise the issue of flags and emblems displayed at local government buildings. In particular I am concerned about the flying of the Union flag from Council offices and the display of portraits of the Queen and Prince Philip inside Council buildings. I am as the Mayor of Lisburn Council and I am sure that you are also concerned about the display of flags and emblems at local government buildings.

I have received for your attention a notice of motion that I brought to the Council in relation to this matter. I have also sent you correspondence concerning this issue between myself and the Equality Commission and a letter sent to the Chief Executive of Lisburn Council on the same subject.

Local government buildings should be seen as neutral and representing all of the people of a particular Council area. The display of the Union flag at Lisburn Council buildings is clearly seen by the nationalist newspapers of Lisburn Council as "marking out of territory" by one section of the community and not inclusive of all of the people of Lisburn's Borough. I am also concerned about the effects that the display of flags and emblems has on the composition of the workforce and in particular on the number of Catholics who are employed by the Council. Only 15% of the workforce at Lisburn Council are Catholic. The display of flags and emblems that are associated with that and homogeneous working environment which is needed to encourage new Catholics to apply for jobs with the Council.

I ask you as First Minister to look at the display of flags and emblems at local government buildings and consider ways in which local government can be seen as inclusive and representative of all sections of the people it serves. Local government buildings and the services that they provide need to be seen as belonging to all of the residents of that Council area.

LISBURN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Sinn Fein Councillor Paul Anthony Butler
Constituency Office, 226 Stewartstown Road, Dunmurry. BT 17 OLB
Tel: 611176 \ Fax: 611237

David Trimble
First Minister
Parliament Buildings
Belfast
BT4 3XX

10th April 2001



RE: FLAGS AND EMBLEMS DISPLAYED AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

David A Chara

I would like to raise the issue of flags and emblems displayed at local government buildings. In particular I am concerned about the flying of the Union flag from Council offices and the display of portraits of the Queen and Prince Phillip inside Council buildings. I am an elected member of Lisburn Council and flags and emblems are displayed all year round at the Council buildings.

I have enclosed for your attention a notice of motion that I brought to the Council in relation to this matter. I have also sent you correspondence concerning this issue between myself and the Equality Commission and a letter sent to the Chief Executive of Lisburn Council on the same subject.

Local government buildings should be seen as neutral and representing all of the people of a particular Council area. The display of the Union flag at Lisburn Council buildings is clearly seen by the nationalist ratepayers of Lisburn Council as "marking out of territory" by one section of the community and not inclusive of all of the people of Lisburn's borough. I am also concerned about the effects that the display of flags and emblems has on the composition of the workforce and in particular on the numbers of Catholics who are employed by the Council. Only 15% of the workforce at Lisburn Council are Catholic. The display of flags and emblems does not create a neutral and harmonious working environment which is needed to encourage more Catholics to apply for jobs with the Council.

I ask you as First Minister to look at the display of flags and emblems at local government buildings and consider ways in which local government can be seen as inclusive and representative of all sections of the people it serves. Local government institutions and the services that they provide need to be seen as belonging to all of the ratepayers of that Council area.

Symbols and emblems displayed at local government need to be used in a manner which promotes mutual respect for both traditions. On Lisburn Council this is clearly not the case at present.

Is mise le meas Councillor Paul Butler

Paul Butler



Deputy First Minister (Room 15)
Parliament Buildings
Belfast
BT4 3PP

20th April 2001

RE: FLAGS AND EMBLEMS DISPLAYED AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

Sir and A. Clerk

I would like to raise the issue of flags and emblems displayed at local government buildings. In particular I am concerned about the flying of the Union Jack from Council offices and the display of portraits of the Queen and Prince Philip inside Council buildings. I am an elected member of Lisburn Council and flags and emblems are displayed all year round at the Council buildings.

I have enclosed for your attention a copy of a paper that I brought to the Council last session on this matter. I have also sent you correspondence regarding this issue between myself and the Equality Commission and a letter sent to the Chair of Lisburn Council on the same subject.

Local government buildings should be seen as neutral and representing all of the people of a particular Council area. The display of the Union Jack at Lisburn Council buildings is clearly seen by the numerous residents of Lisburn Council as "making out of context" by one section of the community and not inclusive of all of the people of Lisburn Borough. I am also concerned about the effect that the display of flags and emblems has on the composition of the workforce and in particular on the numbers of Catholics who are employed by the Council. Only 15% of the workforce at Lisburn Council are Catholic. The display of flags and emblems does not create a neutral and harmonious working environment which is needed to encourage more Catholics to apply for jobs with the Council.

I ask you as Deputy First Minister to look at the display of flags and emblems at local government buildings and consider ways in which local government can be seen as inclusive and representative of all sections of the people it serves. Local government institutions and the services that they provide need to be seen as belonging to all of the residents of the Council area.

LISBURN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Sinn Fein Councillor ~~Paul~~ Anthony Butler
Constituency Office, 226 Stewartstown Road, Dunmurry. BT 17 OLB
Tel: 611176 \ Fax: 611237



Seamus Mallon
Deputy First Minister [Room 15]
Parliament Buildings
Belfast
BT4 3PP

10th April 2001

RE: FLAGS AND EMBLEMS DISPLAYED AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

Seamus A Chara

I would like to raise the issue of flags and emblems displayed at local government buildings. In particular I am concerned about the flying of the Union flag from Council offices and the display of portraits of the Queen and Prince Phillip inside Council buildings. I am an elected member of Lisburn Council and flags and emblems are displayed all year round at the Council buildings.

I have enclosed for your attention a notice of motion that I brought to the Council in relation to this matter. I have also sent you correspondence concerning this issue between myself and the Equality Commission and a letter sent to the Chief Executive of Lisburn Council on the same subject.

Local government buildings should be seen as neutral and representing all of the people of a particular Council area. The display of the Union flag at Lisburn Council buildings is clearly seen by the nationalist ratepayers of Lisburn Council as "marking out of territory" by one section of the community and not inclusive of all of the people of Lisburn's borough. I am also concerned about the effects that the display of flags and emblems has on the composition of the workforce and in particular on the numbers of Catholics who are employed by the Council. Only 15% of the workforce at Lisburn Council are Catholic. The display of flags and emblems does not create a neutral and harmonious working environment which is needed to encourage more Catholics to apply for jobs with the Council.

I ask you as Deputy First Minister to look at the display of flags and emblems at local government buildings and consider ways in which local government can be seen as inclusive and representative of all sections of the people it serves. Local government institutions and the services that they provide need to be seen as belonging to all of the ratepayers of that Council area.

Symbols and emblems displayed at local government need to be used in a manner which promotes mutual respect for both traditions. On Lisburn Council this is clearly not the case at present.

Is mise le meas Councillor Paul Butler

Paul Butler.

4 Report by Chief Executive

A copy of a Report prepared by the Chief Executive had been furnished to all Members of Council with the Notice convening the Meeting.

It was agreed to adopt the Report and Recommendations of the Chief Executive, subject to any decisions recorded below:-

4.1 Council Equality Scheme

4.1.1 Progress Report

The Chief Executive advised that as agreed at its last Meeting, the Council's Draft Equality Scheme had been furnished to the Equality Commission by the stipulated date, a substantive response to which was still awaited.

Members were also advised that pending receipt by the Council of comments by the Equality Commission on its Draft Equality Scheme, other actions still required to be progressed by the Council and particularly the screening of all Council policies to ensure that they complied with equality legislation. In this regard, Ms Claire Armstrong, Equality Officer, proceeded to briefly outline to Members the content of her report, a copy of which had been previously circulated to Members, in relation to progress made to date by Lisburn Borough Council on the implementation of the Equality Scheme and in particular the process of policy screening and prioritisation.

Following concerns expressed by Councillor W E Falloon regarding the legality of the Council's draft Equality Scheme and in particular the development of the equality process in advance of comments received from the Equality Commission, it was agreed that:-

- (i) the Equality Commission be pressed for an early response to the Council's draft Equality Scheme in order that it may conclude its deliberations on this matter.
- (ii) legal opinion be sought by the Council on any comments which may be received from the Equality Commission regarding the Council's draft Equality Scheme and that a report thereon be brought back to a future Meeting of the Committee if necessary.

In terms of the consultation process, Members noted that the proposed consultation process would also include the Secretary of each of the Political Parties in the province for comment and that Members would have the opportunity to use this as a mechanism to express any views which they may have on this issue.

4.1.2 Notice of Motion Councillor P A Butler

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that at the Meeting of Council held on 22nd June, 2000, the undernoted Notice of Motion in the name of Councillor P A Butler, a copy of which had been previously furnished to Members, was referred to the Strategic Policy Committee for further consideration.

4. Report by Chief Executive (Continued)

~~1.1.2. The Council should~~
~~consider the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes, and the need in particular~~
~~in creating the new institutions to ensure that such~~
~~symbols and emblems are used in a manner which~~
~~promotes mutual respect.~~ (Continued)

"All participants to the Good Friday Agreement acknowledge the sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes, and the need in particular in creating the new institutions to ensure that such symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect.

District Councils, and in particular Lisburn Council should also acknowledge the sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems in the Council Offices. The display of the Union flag outside the Council Offices, and pictures in the Council chamber of the Queen and Prince Philip do not promote mutual respect for both traditions within Lisburn Borough.

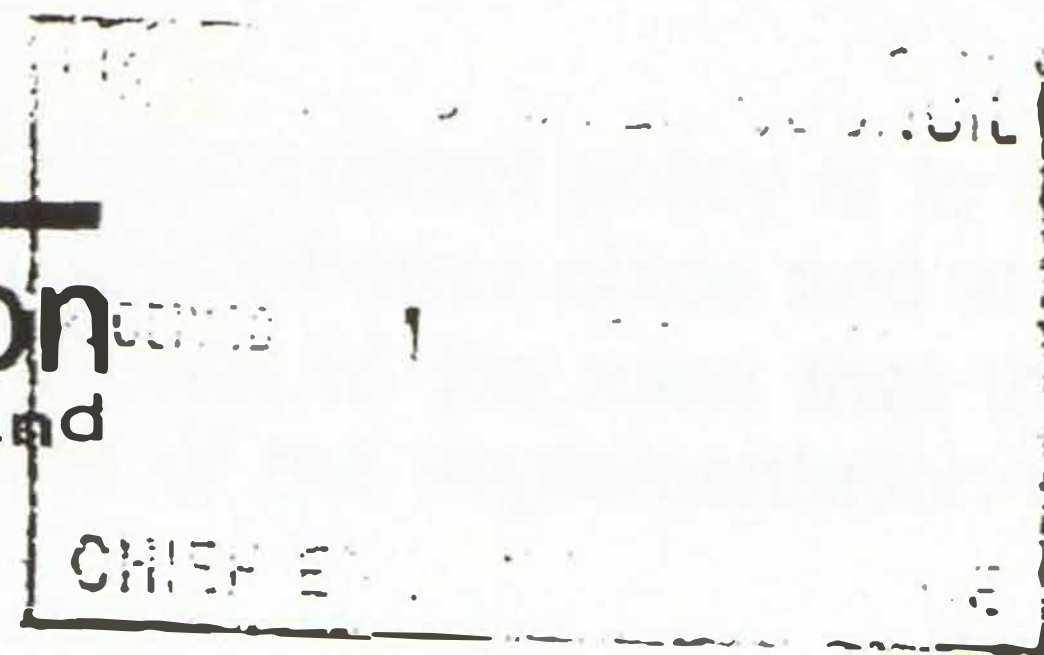
If Lisburn Council are to be inclusive and committed to the promotion of both traditions within the borough, then the issue of flags and emblems needs to be addressed. Moreover, if Lisburn Council are to demonstrate that they are committed to equality, and the provisions in the equality legislation, then there must be a change in the present policy of displaying the flag and symbols of only one tradition in the Lisburn Borough.

If Lisburn Council are to show that they are committed to mutual respect for both traditions in the Borough then the flag and symbols displayed by the Council must be either neutralised or equalised. In that way Lisburn Council will be acknowledging what it states in the Good Friday Agreement, "that symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division". If the above policy is implemented by the Council it will help demonstrate that Lisburn Council are committed to bringing about equality".

Members noted that in line with previous related matters, the consideration of the aforementioned Notice of Motion would take place by the Committee following receipt of comments from the Equality Commission on the Council's Draft Equality Scheme.

The Chief Executive reminded Members that at a Special Meeting of the Corporate Services Committee held on 22nd June, 2000, it was noted that the comments by Councillor Rev Wm J Beattie regarding the matter of flagpoles and flags at the Lagan Valley Island development would be discussed by the Strategic Policy Committee as part of the equality debate.

Equality Commission
for Northern Ireland



Fair Employment & Treatment Directorate
Andras House, 60 Great Victoria Street, Belfast BT2 7BB
Tel: 02890-500600 • Fax: 02890-331544 • Textphone: 02890-240010
e-mail: info.fair@equalityni.org

COPY FOR INFORMATION

Mr. Norman Davidson
Chief Executive
Lisburn Borough Council
The Square
Hillsborough
Co Down
BT26 6AH

10 January 2001

Dear Norman,

I write to you further to recent telephone conversations with Brendan Fitzpatrick in relation to the Council's policy on the display of flags and emblems and the provision of bi-lingual stationary to Councillors. As you may be aware the Commission has been contacted by a local Councillor in relation to these issues.

Flags and Emblems

At the outset I wish to emphasise that the Commission recognises that the issue of the flying of flags and the display of emblems is difficult and sensitive for employers, service providers and the entire community. As you may be aware the Equality Commission addressed the Ad Hoc Committee on the proposed Flags Order in October of last year and I am enclosing a copy of our opening address for your information. You will note that our guidance is based on the promotion of a good and harmonious working environment under fair employment legislation and more recently under S75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Given the legislative context and the sensitivities surrounding this issue, we have drawn a distinction between the ceremonial use and the widespread display of the Union flag. For example the use of the Union Flag on the main administrative headquarters may be justifiable under fair employment legislation, while the display of the Union Flag throughout the Council's workplaces and facilities could involve an expression of sectional community allegiance and as such could be regarded as unacceptable.

Chief Commissioner: Joan Harbison
Deputy Chief Commissioner: Bronagh Hinds

It is our understanding that Lisburn Borough Council's current policy is to fly the Union flag on a permanent basis at its main administrative office and at a number of other facilities. As you are aware we are of the view that the current policy should be reviewed now in advance of the implementation of the Council's Equality Scheme.

The case of Johnson -v- Belfast City Council is the only case to date where a finding of discrimination was based on the display of an 'emblem' identifying community allegiance, in this case a portrait of Her Majesty the Queen. I am enclosing a copy of this decision for your information. The Tribunal found that while the display of the portrait is capable in our society of causing offence to certain sections of the workforce, it accepted that there are circumstances where a display of the portrait is appropriate, for example at certain ceremonial functions. I would emphasise that it would be for the Fair Employment Tribunal to decide whether or not the display of the portrait in Council chambers may be considered to be a ceremonial function taking into account all the circumstances of the case. You may wish to take your own legal advice on this.

From our discussions I understand that you intend to refer this letter and the enclosed guidance to the Council's Strategic Policies Committee. I would be grateful if you would advise us of the outcome of this meeting.

Bi-Lingual Stationery

As agreed I am writing to clarify what I consider to be the legal position in relation to the provision of bi-lingual stationery. With regard to the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages, it is my understanding that it is the British Government's intention to ratify Part iii of the Charter in respect of the Irish Language in Northern Ireland. This ratification will require it to commit itself to specific measures to recognise and promote its use. However, the commitments made under the Charter are not enforceable in the courts. I am not aware of what specific measures will be undertaken to ensure compliance and whether local government bodies will be covered.

The Human Rights Commission is currently consulting on a proposed Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Language issues form a key part of their consultations and consultative leaflet has been produced. This is important as the rights granted under a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights would be enforceable in the local courts.

With regard to the Section 75 duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity and good relations, public authorities are required to include in their equality schemes their "arrangements for ensuring and assessing, public access to information and to services provided by the authority". In this context consideration should be given to Council policies on the use of languages other than English and appropriate formats for communication with particular groups of disabled persons. The Council's Equality Scheme is currently under consideration for approval by the Commission. The Council's communication policy is an important matter, not least because of the

Council's requirement under the Disability Discrimination Act. In our view the fact that the Equality Scheme has not yet been approved should not be cause for a delay in the commencement of work on reviewing this policy.

If you require any clarification or if I can be any further assistance do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

PP *J. N. Kee*

Paul Davidson
General Operations Manager

Cc: Mr. Brendan Fitzpatrick
Deputy Director of Corporate Services

10 January 2004

Subject: Policy on Flags and Emblems

In the subject I wish to emphasize that the Commission recognizes that the use of the Union Jack flag and display of emblems is a symbol of national identity and a source of pride for the community. As you may be aware, the Commission addressed the Ad Hoc Committee on the proposed 'Flag Code' at Council of last year and I am enclosing a copy of the report for your information. You will note that our guidance is based on the provision of a good and harmonious working environment under the Employment Relations Act and more recently under S15 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Given the legislative context and the sensitivities surrounding this issue, we have drawn a distinction between the ceremonial use and the widespread display of the Union Jack. For example the use of the Union Flag on the main administrative headquarters may be particularly appropriate for employment legislation, while the display of the Union Flag throughout the Council's workplace and facilities may be an expression of national community allegiance and as such could be regarded as unacceptable.

Chief Commissioner: Joan Harrison
Deputy Chief Commissioner: Emmaugh Webb
Chief Executive: David Collins

Equality Commission

for Northern Ireland

Andras House, 60 Great Victoria Street, Belfast, BT2 7BB

Tel: 028-90-500600 • Fax: 028-90-329227 • Textphone: 028-90-240010

e-mail: info.commission@equalityni.org

Cllr Paul Butler
Sinn Fein Constituency Office
226 Stewartstown Road
Belfast
BT17

10 January 2001

Dear Councillor Butler,

I am replying to your letters to Joan Harbison, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, in which you have raised concerns relating to the manner Lisburn Borough Council is dealing with the issue of flags and emblems, and in relation to the Council's unwillingness to provide bi-lingual stationery for Councillor's use. Mr. Keith Brown, Director of Advice and Information, tried to contact you before the Christmas break to discuss these issues but unfortunately you were ill and could not be contacted. I hope that you are now fully recovered.

We have written to the Council on the issues you have raised.

Council's Policy on Flags and Emblems

At the outset I wish to emphasise that the Commission recognises that the issue of the flying of flags and display of emblems is difficult and sensitive for employers, service providers and the entire community. As you may be aware the Equality Commission addressed the Ad Hoc Committee on the proposed Flags Order in October of last year and I am enclosing a copy of our opening address for your information. You will note that our guidance is based on the promotion of a good and harmonious working environment under fair employment legislation and more recently under S75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Given the legislative context and the sensitivities surrounding this issue, we have drawn a distinction between the ceremonial use and the widespread display of the Union flag. For example the use of the Union Flag on the main administrative headquarters may be justifiable under fair employment legislation, while the display of the Union Flag throughout the Council's workplaces and facilities could involve an expression of sectional community allegiance and as such could be regarded as unacceptable.

Chief Commissioner: **Joan Harbison**
Deputy Chief Commissioner: **Bronagh Hinds**
Chief Executive: **Evelyn Collins**

It is our understanding that Lisburn Borough Council's current policy is to fly the Union flag on a permanent basis at its main administrative office and at a number of other Council facilities. Council officers have indicated to us that the Commission's guidance on the display of flags will now be referred to the Council's Strategic Policies Committee and will be used to assist with the review of the Council's policy in this area.

The case of Johnson -v- Belfast City Council is the only case to date where a finding of discrimination was based on the display of an 'emblem' identifying community allegiance, in this case a portrait of Her Majesty the Queen. The Tribunal found that while the display of the portrait is capable in our society of causing offence to certain sections of the workforce, it accepted that there are circumstances where a display of the portrait is appropriate, for example at certain ceremonial functions. I would emphasise that it would be for the Fair Employment Tribunal to decide whether or not the display of the portrait in Council chambers may be considered to be a ceremonial function taking into account all the circumstances of the case.

In relation to your concern that the Council's policy is having an adverse effect on the proportion of Catholics applying for vacancies with the Council and that the Council has taken little action to improve the number of Catholics in the workforce it is noted that monitoring information indicates that the proportion of Catholics applying and being appointed to vacancies with the Council has improved in recent years. The Catholic proportion of applicants and appointees in the year 1999 - 2000 was in the region of [30%] and is therefore in line with the proportion of Catholics living in the Lisburn District Council area. The impact of these improved recruitment trends on the composition of the workforce will however be dependent on the volume of recruitment. That said, the Roman Catholic proportion of the workforce has steadily increased from [9.3%] in 1990 to [16.5%] in 2000. Officers of the Commission have been advised that the Council has initiated a programme to develop links with school and community groups serving the Catholic community in the local area. The aim of this programme is to promote job opportunities within the Council and to offer work experience. Commission staff will continue to work with the Council to ensure that the affirmative action programme is effectively implemented.

Provision of Bi-lingual Stationery

With regard to your query concerning the provision of bilingual stationery to Councillors, it might be useful if I clarified what I consider to be the legal position. It is unlikely that your role as a Councillor would be covered by the employment provisions of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order. I have attached Article 28 of the Order, which covers discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities or services. Again, there are legal difficulties, not least because of the wording of Article 28 (b) which refers to 'members of the public'. Although it is my view that it would be unlikely that, as a local Councillor, you would be able to

obtain redress through the provisions of this legislation, it would be for the Fair Employment Tribunal to decide on the basis of the facts placed before it.

With regard to the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages, it is my understanding that it is the British Government's intention to ratify Part iii of the Charter in respect of the Irish Language in Northern Ireland. This ratification will require it to commit itself to specific measures to recognise and promote its use. However, the commitments made under the Charter are not enforceable in the courts. I am not aware of what specific measures will be undertaken to ensure compliance and whether local government bodies will be covered. This is something as a political representative that you may wish to explore with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

The Human Rights Commission is currently consulting on a proposed Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Language issues form a key part of their consultations and a consultative leaflet has been produced. This is important as the rights granted under a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights would be enforceable in the local courts.

With regard to the Section 75 duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity and good relations, public authorities are required to include in their equality schemes their "arrangements for ensuring and assessing, public access to information and to services provided by the authority". In this context consideration should be given to Council policies on the use of languages other than English and appropriate formats for communication with particular groups of disabled persons. The Council's Equality Scheme is currently under consideration for approval by the Commission. The Council's communication policy is an important matter, not least because of the Council's requirement under the Disability Discrimination Act. In our view the fact that the Equality Scheme has not yet been approved should not be cause for a delay in the commencement of work on reviewing this policy.

I hope that the above will be of some assistance to you.

Yours Sincerely


Jacqueline Mc Kee
Director - General Operations

SINN FÉIN CONSTITUENCY OFFICE

226 Stewartstown Road, Belfast BT 17
Assembly Member/Cllr Sue Ramsey
Cllr's Paul Butler, Ita Gray, Michael Ferguson
Ph: 01232 611176 Fax: 01232 611237

Joan Harbinson.
Equality Commission.
Andras House.
Belfast.

18th Nov 2000

A Chara,

Re: Flags and emblems displayed at Lisburn Council offices.

In June of this year I brought a notice of motion to the Council in relation to the flying of flags and the display of emblems at Lisburn Council. I have enclosed a copy of the notice of motion for your attention. When this motion came before the Council it was decided to defer it to the Council's Strategic Policy Committee. This committee is considering the Council's equality scheme and it was decided to look at this motion in the context of the obligations which the Council will have to fulfil under the equality legislation.

While no decision has been made by the Council in relation to the flying of flags and the display of emblems within the Council chamber, I believe that the Equality Commission need to consider this issue in the context of the equality agenda and the new obligations which will be placed upon public authorities to bring about equality. Moreover, the Council should have acted on this issue now rather than wait until their equality scheme is in place. I have a concern that Lisburn Council will try to thwart any attempts to deal with this issue. Therefore the Equality Commission need to address this matter and ensure that there is a statutory duty on public authorities such as Lisburn Council to promote 'full and effective equality'.

Displaying flags and emblems of only one tradition within Lisburn discriminates against the elected representatives on the Council from the republican and nationalist tradition. I do not believe that this is promoting equality between elected representatives of different political belief. I as an elected representative feel that I am being discriminated against and made to carry out my constituency work in an intimidating environment. Moreover, such displays do not promote good relations between elected representatives of different political opinion.