Equality Screening



The Council has a statutory duty to screen. This includes our strategies, plans, policies, legislative developments; and new ways of working such as the introduction, change or end of an existing service, grant funding arrangement or facility. This screening template is designed to help departments consider the likely equality impacts of their proposed decisions on different groups of customers, service users, staff and visitors.

Before carrying out an equality screening exercise it is important that you have received the necessary training first. To find out about the training needed or any other queries on screening, contact the Equality and Diversity Unit by email equality@belfastcity.gov.uk

The accompanying **Screening Guidance** note provides straightforward advice on how to carry out equality screening exercises. Detailed information about the Section 75 equality duties and what they mean in practice is available on the Equality Commission's website¹.

The screening template has 4 sections to complete. These are:

Section A - provides details about the policy / decision that is being screened

Section B – gives information on the consultation process, supporting evidence gathered and has 4 key questions outlining the likely impacts on all equality groups.

Section C - has 4 key questions in relation to obligations under the Disability Discrimination Order

Section D - is the formal record of the screening decision.

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¹ http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/S75GuideforPublicAuthoritiesApril2010.pdf

Section A

Details about the policy / decision to be screened

1. Title of policy / decision to be screened:-

Flying of the National Flag of Palestine above the City Hall on 29th November, 2025

2. Brief description of policy / decision to be screened:-

(Explain - Is this a new, revised or existing policy? Are there financial / legislative / procurement implications?)

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on Friday, 24th October 2025 approved the flying of the Human Rights Day flag and the United Nations flag from the City Hall on 10th December 2025. There were no amendments or proposals.

Approval for the minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee Friday, 24th October 2025 were presented to Council meeting on Monday 3 November 2025. Sinn Féin proposed:

That the minute under the heading "Human Rights Day 2025 - Flag Requests" be amended to also provide that, in recognition of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, that the Council agrees to erect the National Flag of Palestine above the City Hall on 29th November 2025.

On a vote, forty-one voted for the amendment and fifteen against and it was accordingly declared carried.

3. Aims and objectives of the policy / decision to be screened:-

The amendment proposed by Sinn Féin to the minute under the heading "Human Rights Day 2025 - Flag Requests" states that the aim of the flying of the National Flag of Palestine above the City Hall on 29th November 2025 is in recognition of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The decision was democratically made with forty-one Elected Members voting for the amendment and fifteen against. The fifteen Elected Members who voted against the amendment were from Unionist parties. No Unionist party member voted for the amendment.

The flying of flags in the north of Ireland is complex and politically sensitive. The iconic nature of City Hall means that it is a regular site of protest for different identity groups, with flags often present as indicators of support for one identity group over another.

Information on the aim of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is extracted from the United Nations website²:

² https://www.un.org/en/observances/international-day-of-solidarity-with-the-palestinian-people

In 1977, the General Assembly called for the annual observance of 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (<u>resolution 32/40 B</u>). On that day, in 1947, the Assembly adopted the resolution on the partition of Palestine (<u>resolution 181 (II)</u>)

In <u>resolution 60/37</u> of 1 December 2005, the Assembly requested the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights, as part of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November, to continue to organize an annual exhibit on Palestinian rights or a cultural event in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the UN.

The resolution on the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People also encourages Member States to continue to give the widest support and publicity to the observance of the Day of Solidarity.

The UN statement provides some insight into the military and socio-political conflict in and about Palestine, which has its origins in 1940s. Over the decades since then issues from water rights to acts of terror have been framed within what is most often known as the Israeli – Palestine conflict, which has escalated in recent years leading to a humanitarian crisis. The war between Israel and Palestine is an ongoing localised, intricate conflict with connections to the Arab- Israeli Wars, demonstrating the major conflicts fought between Israel and neighbouring Arab states.

4. On whom will the policy / decision impact?

Consider the internal and external impacts (both actual or potential) and explain:-

Staff YES

Service users YES

Other public sector organizations YES

Voluntary / community groups / trade unions YES

Others, please specify YES

The flying of the flags may have an impact on different user groups due to their symbolic nature as displays of solidarity. Flying of the National Flag of Palestine at City Hall is of greater significance as it is a prominent, iconic building in the capital city of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

5. Are there linkages to other Agencies/ Departments?

The flying of flags and demonstrations of support from different identity groups impact on different agencies and departments, including local and central government. The legislative and policy framework

for the governing of flags differs between central government and local government. In addition, each Council area makes its own decisions on relevant matters.

Section B

Information on the consultation process, supporting evidence gathered and has 4 key questions outlining the likely impacts for equality and good relations

6. Outline consultation process planned or achieved.

Elected Members have made the decision through democratic processes at the Council meeting on 3 November 2025 to erect the National Flag of Palestine above the City Hall on 29th November 2025.

Our 60 elected councillors represent the people of Belfast. The Council serves an overall population of 333,000 and are responsible for a range of powers and services, including land-use planning, community planning and off-street parking. The Council also have responsibility for enhanced economic, physical and social regeneration. The 60 councillors represent the 10 district electoral areas of the council area.

7. Available evidence

What evidence / information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Set out all evidence below to help inform your screening assessment.

It is important to record information gathered from a variety of sources such as: monitoring information; complaints; research surveys; consultation exercises from other public authorities.

The evidence presented below summarises available information on the policy aim and considers flags and identity issues related to equality, good relations and the constitutional status of the north of Ireland / Northern Ireland, which is politically divisive between U/unionists and N/nationalists and the status of City Hall as a workplace.

1. At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 21 September 2018³ clarification on the legislation governing displays in the workplace, of clothing or other items which might be deemed to be offensive was presented. The Committee adopted the recommendation, and the minutes were approved with no amendments at Council on 1 October 2018.

A comprehensive report regarding the current legislation and guidance was attached and this included advice from the Equality Commission and Council's Application of the Guidance. Belfast City Council's approach to promoting and maintaining a good and harmonious working environment was outlined based on:

- Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998
- The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998
- The Fair Employment in Northern Ireland Code of Practice
- Guidance from the Equality Commission on Promoting a Good & Harmonious Working Environment

The main points were highlighted:

³ https://minutes.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/s74049/pr210918m2.pdf

- The City Hall including the Council Chamber should be considered a workplace environment given that staff are situated and working within these locations. In addition, they are used by clients, customers, third parties and members of the public. Therefore, the good and harmonious environment is required to be promoted within these settings by all who use them.
- While there is no definitive or exhaustive list about what is deemed offensive given the variety of emblems etc. which exist and the fact that context often plays a part, the current BCC Joint Declaration of Protection and the guidance from the Equality Commission should be taken into consideration along with the duty to promote equality and good relations.
- In addition, as outlined in the Code of Conduct for Councillors, the promotion of a culture of respect, equality and trust and the embracing of diversity in all its forms should be sought.
- Furthermore, Members should display civic leadership on compliance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and how we promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

In addition to the appended report providing clarity on legislation governing the workplace, two other appendices were attached (i) EQIA Consultation Report Recommendations: Promoting a Good and Harmonious Environment December 2012 (ii) Belfast City Council Joint Declaration of Protection September 1997. An extract from the Joint Declaration of Protection seeks commitment from Elected Members in implementing the Council's policy which requires 'Commitment to promoting and maintaining a good and harmonious working environment in which the dignity of every employee is respected.'

- 2. The report on Segregation and the Environment; Breaking Down Barriers (Belfast City Council, August 2024) outlined the complexity of equality, good relations and the city's resilience capability.
- 3. The Council is in the process of developing a new Good Relations Strategy and Multi Year Action Plan which seeks to set the Council's strategic direction on Good Relations for the next 10 years. Over the past 6 months considerable consultation and engagement has taken place, with over 400 engagements with Community, Statutory, Government and Political Sectors.
- 4. The Shared City Partnership was established by Belfast City Council to support Council to meet its obligations in the promotion of good relations. This relates to Section 75, part B, which states; 'a public authority is required, in carrying out its functions, to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief; political opinion and different racial group.'

The SCP is formally established as a Working Group of the Council's Strategic Policy & Resources Committee and as such, all recommendations of the SCP are subject to the agreement of that Committee and to ratification by the full Council.

5. The Commission of Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (FICT) report was published in 2021. The report contains the findings of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition. The report was published by The Executive and notes:

The Commission hopes that the recommendations can aid in a process where issues of Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition are no longer contested and contentious, but become a means by which we foster, develop and embed respect, a key outcome in the Programme for Government.

- 6. The Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign in Belfast are holding a demonstration at City Hall on Friday 14 November 2025 at 6:00 PM, to 'march for Palestinian children in need'⁴. Their aims are to:
 - Demand immediate humanitarian access, protection for civilians, and safe medical evacuations for children who urgently need specialist treatment.
 - Amplify the story of Wafaa Hamad so no other child faces the same fate. Wafaa died
 after more than a year of suffering because she was repeatedly denied evacuation,
 medicine and adequate care.
 - Hold a peaceful, family-friendly demonstration.

The event is hosted by Belfast members of the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) which exists to mobilise people in Ireland to support the political, civil and human rights of all Palestinians, and to work for their national and democratic rights including the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees and their descendants. The IPSC was set up in 2001 by Irish human rights and community activists, academics, trade unionists, journalists, and Palestinians living in Ireland.⁵

- 7. The Parades Commission⁶ details applications made for marches and demonstrations due to take place in Belfast on Saturday 29 November 2025, these are:
 - 1642 Boyne Bridge Defenders Historical Group
 - Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign
 - ##AA Veterans Support##
 - Ulster-Scots Agency
 - Reclaim the Agenda

⁴ https://www.facebook.com/BelfastIPSC?locale=en_GB

⁵ https://www.ipsc.ie/about/aims

⁶ https://www.paradescommission.org/

Section 75 Details of evidence/information and engagement category On Census Day 21st March 2021, considering the resident population within the Religious belief Belfast City Council area: 49% belong to or were brought up in the Catholic religion (NI 46%) and 36% belong to or were brought up in a 'Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)' religion (NI 43%); and 3% other religions (NI 1%) and 12% no religion (NI 9%). Christianity remains the main religion. Religious diversity reflected through Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist and Jewish communities is not captured at Census level. The Jewish Small Communities Network⁷ provides further insight to the Jewish community in Belfast noting 'although the synagogue is today down to under 80 members the Belfast Jewish community continues to make a contribution to life in Northern Ireland out of proportion to its numbers.' The Jewish community is amongst Northern Ireland's oldest ethnic and religious minorities and has thrived over four or five generations. The Jewish Small Communities Network states 'If today its numbers have declined, the Jewish community continues to play a significant role in the religious and cultural life of the province.' Further information provided by the Jewish Small Communities Network includes: Belfast boasts a thriving branch of the Council of Christians and Jews and a friendship society for elderly members of the Jewish and wider communities. The community plays a significant part in supporting annual Holocaust commemorations in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Friends of Israel combines Jewish and non-Jewish supporters and has attracted over 6,000 people to its events since its launch in 2009. The Metropolitan District Council for the City of Bradford received a petition from their Elected Members on 11th March 2025 to fly the Palestinian Flag on 29th November, UN International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

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⁷ https://jscn.org.uk/belfast-jewish-community/

A report prepared by their Director of Legal and Governance's⁸ recommendations on flying the Palestinian flag was based on consultations and advised:

Equality and diversity are a significant factor in this decision. The advice following an equality impact assessment is that flying the flag would not foster good relations between those of different protected characteristics. However, the advice also recognises that as the duty on the decision maker is only to have due regard to the impact of the proposal and any potential mitigation to be lawful.

The context for the assessment should be noted as population demographics in Bradford are very different than in Belfast with larger number of Jews and of Muslims. The Equality Impact Assessment, carried out under the Equality Act 2010, on the impact of flying the Palestinian also considered hate crime statistics and community cohesion, with the need for the Council to represent the whole of the community. Engagement with different communities in Bradford gave some insight to religious identities and flags:

- Council for Mosques are strongly in favour of showing solidarity with the people of Gaza and Palestine and support the raising of the flag.
- Other faiths were inclined to be supportive but also aware that flags can become divisive.
- The Jewish community representative expressed the damage to inter-faith relationships and trust.

The correlations between political, religious and racial background simply described as inter-faith relations are much more complex with identity constructed from race and geographic origin, as well as religion.

In Belfast City Council the composition of the workforce is shown in the most recent Article 55 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 figures, which are:

As at 01/01/23, there are 62.8% male employees and 37.2% female employees.

For employees who worked 16 hours or more per week.

The proportion of Protestants is 51.6% whilst the proportion of Roman Catholics is 48.4% (excluding non-determined).

⁸ https://bradford.moderngov.co.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=7172

For employees who work less than 16 hours per week

The proportion of Protestants and Roman Catholics is 45.3% and 54.7% respectively.

Political opinion

The Local Government Election May 2023 returned 60 elected members in total from the following political parties:

Party	Number of Members
Sinn Fein	22
Democratic Unionist Party	14
Alliance Party	11
Social Democratic & Labour Party	5
Green Party	3
Ulster Unionist Party	2
Independent	1
People Before Profit Alliance	1
Traditional Unionist Voice	1
Total	60

In the context of Northern Ireland there are correlations between political, religious and racial background. Reports including 'Flags towards a New Understanding' (Bryan and Nolan, Institute of Irish Studies, 2016) and 'Sectarianism in Northern Ireland: A Review' (Morrow et al, 2018) demonstrate the depth of complexity of political opinion and how it impacts on everyday life. Various legal opinions also reflect matters relevant to political opinion. Salient matters include:

- The flying of flags at local government buildings is left to the discretion of the local authority as it is not regulated by legislation- the Flags (NI) Order 2000 and Flags Regulations (NI) 2000.
- The flying of flags at City Hall is a politically sensitive matter. On 3 December 2012 the Council agreed to adopt a policy of flying the Union Flag at City Hall on designated days only. The policy follows the designated days set out by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. That decision was an emotive one for the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community. Weekly processions and protests ensued in the city, often resulting in civil

disorder. Whilst protests against that decision have become less frequent, it is understood that minor protests do still take place. The Council does not have a policy which deals specifically with the flying of other flags, that is to say, flags other than the Union Flag. The policy, in that respect, is that requests to fly a flag are considered by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on a case by case basis. Decisions of the Committee are subject to ratification by the full Council. The fifteen Elected Members who voted against the amendment were from Unionist parties. The appearance of Palestinian and Israeli flags, being flown as markers of segregation in Belfast has received attention since the early 2000s. The increased number of Israel flags in U/unionist areas and commentary was assessed using articles from the Belfast Telegraph, the News Letter and the Irish News.9 Also surveyed were the newsletters An Phoblacht/Republican News and Loyalist. From their findings researchers summarised the: [G]raphic demonstration of the increased prevalence of political symbolism in the post-Troubles era and the way in which groups in Northern Ireland have sought to reference and draw upon similar conflict situations for their own agendas. Racial group In the context of Northern Ireland there are correlations between political, religious and racial background. For example in relation to national identity many Protestants identify as British and many Catholics identify as Irish. However, this is a complex correlation, as significant research into identity and race such as the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, demonstrates. There is no specific evidence for these groups identified as relevant to the policy Age and therefore it cannot be gathered at this stage. Marital status Sexual orientation Men and women generally

Disability

Dependents

⁹ https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10702890701801775

8. What is the likely impact (indicate if the policy impact is positive or negative) on <u>equality of opportunity</u> for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? What is the level of impact?

Section 75 category	Likely impact?	Level of impact? Minor/Major/None
Religious belief	The information gathered, both qualitative and	Minor
Political opinion	quantitative, demonstrates the complexity of some of the	
Racial group	issues relating to protected characteristics listed under Section 75. The impact of a flag flying for a single day	
Age	should be considered in proportionality to the adverse	
Marital status	impact.	
Sexual orientation		
Men and women		
generally		
Disability		
Dependants		

9. Are there opportunities to better promote <u>equality of opportunity</u> for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?

The 2012 EQIA on the flying of the Union flag concluded that there was no evidence to show that the presence of the flag on a permanent basis restricted access to the City Hall or its grounds in any way or prevented anyone from accessing the services and events provided there and that there was therefore no adverse impact on equality of opportunity.

In the 2013 screening of the flying of the Armed Forces flag on a small number of days it was also considered not to have any impact on access to the City Hall and therefore on equality of opportunity.

Section 75 category	If Yes, provide details	If No, provide reasons
Religious belief		The information gathered, both qualitative and
Political opinion		quantitative, demonstrates the inter-relationships
		between the protected characteristics listed under
Racial group		Section 75. No specific opportunities to better
Age		promote equality of opportunity for one particular
Marital status		group has been identified in relation to this policy.

Sexual orientation		However, it is important for the work undertaken in
Men and women		City Hall, including the exhibition and stain glass
generally		windows which represents diverse backgrounds in
		Belfast, and the recently opened changing places
Disability		facility, to be promoted as symbols of the city of
Dependants Belfast, which aims to be welcoming,		Belfast, which aims to be welcoming, safe, fair and
		inclusive for all.

10. To what extent is the policy likely to impact (positive or negatively) on <u>good relations</u> between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? What is the level of impact?

Good relations category	Likely impact?	Level of impact? Minor/Major/None
Religious belief	Good relations issues are conventionally understood to be	Minor
Political opinion	between the two main communities in Belfast - Protestant / Unionist / Loyalist and Catholic / Nationalist / Republican, including those from different racial backgrounds.	
Racial group		
	However, the issue of Israel and Palestine has and is continuing to divide the communities listed above which is clearly visible with public domain.	

11. Are there opportunities to better promote <u>good relations</u> between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Good relations category	If Yes, provide details	If No, provide reasons
Religious belief	The Council ensures, as far as reasonably possible, that there is	
Political opinion	a balance between events and supportive action which are of	
Racial group	relevance to the two main communities, structured on religious, political and racial identities.	
	It should be noted that the two 'main' communities understood as	
	N/nationalist and U/unionist are structured on religious, political	
	and racial divisions. Issues of social justice are common in both	
	'main communities' and are based upon shared, lived	
	experiences of barriers based on disability, gender, sexual	
	orientation, age and dependents status. A focus on social justice	

should be prioritised through the lens of good relations and	
inequalities.	

Section C

Belfast City Council also has legislative obligations to meet under the <u>Disability Discrimination Order</u> and Questions 12-13 relate to these two areas.

Consideration of Disability Duties

12. Does this proposed policy / decision provide an opportunity for the Council to better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people?

Explain your assessment in full

There are no opportunities within this current policy to better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people.

13. Does this proposed policy / decision provide an opportunity to actively increase the participation by disabled people in public life?

Explain your assessment in full

There are no opportunities within this current policy to actively increase the participation by disabled people in public life.

14. Multiple Identities

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy with multiple identities

The information gathered, both qualitative and quantitative, demonstrates the complexity of some of the issues relating to protected characteristics listed under Section 75.

Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

15. Monitoring Arrangements

Section 75 places a requirement the Council to have equality monitoring arrangements in place in order to assess the impact of policies and services etc; and to help identify barriers to fair participation and to better promote equality of opportunity.

Outline what data you will collect in the future in order to monitor the impact of this policy / decision on equality, good relations and disability duties.

Equality	Good Relations	Disability Duties
Comments and complaints from	Comments and complaints from	Comments and complaints from
various groups.	various groups.	various groups.

Section D

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Formal Record of Screening Decision

Title of Proposed Policy / Decision being screened

Flying of the National Flag of Palestine above the City Hall on 29th November, 2025

I can confirm that the proposed policy / decision has been screened for -

х	equality of opportunity and good relations
х	disabilities duties

On the basis of the answers to the screening questions, I recommend that this policy / decision is – (place an X in the appropriate box below)

*Screened In - Necessary to conduct a full EQIA

*Screened Out - No EQIA necessary (no impacts)

Provide a brief note here to explain how this decision was reached:

- * <u>Screened Out Mitigating Actions (minor impacts)</u>
 - Provide a brief note here to explain how this decision was reached:
 - Explain what mitigating actions and / or policy changes will now be introduced:

Raising awareness of the Ouncil's approach to an inclusive and diverse society may counter any perceived negative impact.

Formal Record of Screening Decision (cont.)

Screening assessment completed by (Officer Level) -

Name: Lorraine Dennis

Date: 13/11/25

Screening decision approved by:

Name: Nora Largey Date: 19/11/25

Department: Legal and Civic Services

Please save the <u>final version</u> of the completed screening form and forward to the Equality and Diversity Unit – <u>equality@belfastcity.gov.uk</u>. The screening form will be placed on the BCC website and a link provided to the Council's Section 75 consultees.

For more information about equality screening contact -

Equality & Diversity Unit
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast

BT1 5GS

Telephone: 028 9027 0511 equality@belfastcity.gov.uk

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