

CAJ's submission no. S403

CAJ's Response to the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP) Draft Equality Schemes

February 2013

About CAJ

The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) was established in 1981 and is an independent non-governmental organisation affiliated to the International Federation of Human Rights. CAJ takes no position on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and is firmly opposed to the use of violence for political ends. Its membership is drawn from across the community.

The Committee seeks to ensure the highest standards in the administration of justice in Northern Ireland by ensuring that the government complies with its responsibilities in international human rights law. The CAJ works closely with other domestic and international human rights groups such as Amnesty International, Human Rights First (formerly the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights) and Human Rights Watch and makes regular submissions to a number of United Nations and European bodies established to protect human rights.

CAJ's activities include - publishing reports, conducting research, holding conferences, campaigning locally and internationally, individual casework and providing legal advice. Its areas of work are extensive and include policing, emergency laws and the criminal justice system, equality and advocacy for a Bill of Rights.

CAJ however would not be in a position to do any of this work, without the financial help of its funders, individual donors and charitable trusts (since CAJ does not take government funding). We would like to take this opportunity to thank Atlantic Philanthropies, Barrow Cadbury Trust, Hilda Mullen Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Oak Foundation and UNISON.

The organisation has been awarded several international human rights prizes, including the Reebok Human Rights Award and the Council of Europe Human Rights Prize.

The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) would like to respond with the following comments to the draft Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) Equality Schemes in light of the engagement event held on Wednesday 23 January 2013 with the Equality Coalition.

We would firstly like to welcome the fact that PCSPs have adopted the ECNI model scheme. Below are a few minor comments on the PCSP draft equality schemes and accompanying documents:

- It is helpful that equality schemes and accompanying documents are available on the PCSPs websites but due to the large amounts of public authorities it would be helpful for the PCSPs to email out a link to their documents when they are up for consultation or approved etc. Please also be mindful that hard copies are needed for some consultee groups.
- Screening – In all PCSP schemes there is a commitment to screen annually. Consultees would like to be updated **quarterly** even if no policies have been screened. If it is the case that PCSPs adopt no policies then the overall council screening update could include a line about this at the bottom of their screening update. Quarterly is important for civil society to be informed as sooner many can see of policies for which ‘no’ or ‘minor’ impact was found, but for which they may have specialist knowledge of otherwise unforeseen equality impacts then they can engage with the PCSPs.
- Commitment to extended the consultation periods when the consultation is done over a holiday period is again welcomed although CAJ would remind the PCSPs that this is not an ideal consultation time and would ask them to avoid this when at all possible.
- CAJ would like to take this opportunity to remind PCSPs that where possible it would be good to use community and voluntary groups to train staff.
- It is good practise that the PCSPs respond to a complaint within 7 days, but it needs to be clarified in the equality scheme if this is 7 ‘working days’ or a calendar week. On the same note 20 days for accessible formats needs to say if this is 20 ‘working days’ as 20 days could be nearly a month excluding weekends. The timescale when getting accessible formats out could also be based on how urgent the request is a shorter timescale would be welcomed for important requests.

- Monitoring annually, note the Equality Commission advises: 'Equality monitoring is not solely about the collection of data. Nor should it be seen as an end in itself. Rather, monitoring provides a basis for positive action to promote equality of opportunity', (see reference found [HERE](#)). Hence the monitoring of data should be collected on an ongoing basis.

We acknowledge that some of the PCSPs have published and consulted upon their audit of inequalities. This is welcomed, as it helps civil society inform PCSPs of any irregularities or omissions, and also provide a useful frame of reference for the draft action plan. We recommend that PCSPs continue to commit to publish and consult on its audit of inequalities in the future, by explicitly adding the audit as a document for which PCSPs will seek input from its stakeholders and consult upon (at para 2.15 draft equality scheme). *Please note that, due to a lack of resources, we have not reviewed the PCSPs audit of inequalities or draft action plan.*

We would like to remind PCSPs that, in addition to the s75 action-based plan, s75 continues to apply to all its policies in relation to all nine equality groups. Although we recognise the positive impacts that the action-based plan could have on addressing inequalities, we are also aware that it could have a limiting influence on the operation of s75 outside the specific priorities identified within it. Also, newly emerging inequalities may not be captured in the original audit of inequalities. We therefore hope that any data gaps identified in the audit of inequalities will be addressed, and that the audit will provide a useful tool for policy-makers when applying s75 beyond the scope of the action plan.

The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) thanks the PCSPs for this opportunity to respond to their draft equality schemes.