

Carlisle City Council – Disability Equality Scheme

Introduction

The report “Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People”¹ highlighted that a range of public services failed to give disabled people the same opportunities and choice as non-disabled people.

As a result the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit set a clear ambition that by 2025, disabled people should have the same opportunities and choices as everyone else, should be respected as equal members of society, and should be able to participate as equals in every aspect of family and community life.

This change will not happen without real and practical change in the way we deliver our services, in the way we recruit, employ and promote people and in the way we seek to engage with everyone in our community.

Carlisle City Council is committed to making the changes that are necessary – we have promised, in our Corporate Plan that we will do all we can:

“To ensure Carlisle is a safe and attractive place where people feel they belong and are included.”

The new Disability Equality Duty and the duty to prepare a Disability Equality Scheme will assist us in ensuring that we are proactive in promoting disability equality.

The purpose of the Council’s Disability Equality Scheme is to ensure that the necessary changes are made.

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As an organisation, the Council recognises and embraces the need to remove organisational, environmental and attitudinal barriers which prevent full access and participation. We need to adopt an approach that recognises that exclusion of disabled people results not from their impairments or conditions, but as a result of how the Council may operate – the “social model of disability”.

Background

Carlisle City Council is committed to ensuring a high quality of life for all in both its urban and rural communities.

This commitment is reflected in three of the Council's eight core values:

- ◆ Putting customers first;
- ◆ Valuing staff; and
- ◆ Achieving equality.

In practice this means that the Council will ensure that the varied needs and circumstances of residents and employees are met and that its services are provided to all without discrimination. We recognise that promoting equality means tackling discrimination and social exclusion, challenging intolerance, widening access to services and jobs and ensuring that everyone receives high quality service.

The Council recognises and embraces its role in promoting good community relations and recognises the need to:

- ◆ Identify a common sense of vision and belonging for all of Carlisle's communities;
- ◆ Value and appreciate the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances;
- ◆ Ensure that everyone living, working, studying and visiting Carlisle has similar access to services and opportunities; and
- ◆ Develop strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds and experience.

Carlisle City Council is working towards embedding these commitments into all of its policies, procedures, practices and external relationships. We have adopted the Equality Standard for Local Government as a mechanism for improving our approach to

equalities. The standard helps to ensure that considerations of equality are built into all our decision making as an employer, service provider and community leader.

Figures

There is little information about the experience of disabled people locally, but **national studies** highlight some of the issues that we need to be aware of:

- The Disability Rights Commission (2005) estimates that people with learning difficulties are 58 times more likely to die before the age of 50 than non-disabled people;
- The Disability Rights Commission (2003) NOP survey found that 7 out of 10 disabled people with mobility and sensory impairments in Britain say that they have difficulty in accessing goods and services. The factors most likely to cause problems are steps at the entrance, heavy internal and external doors, use of disabled parking by non-disabled customers, no lifts and inaccessible toilets;
- The Disability Rights Commission/Capability Scotland (2004) research highlights that almost 50% of disabled respondents had experienced abuse because of their impairment. The examples given range from serious physical assault, intimidation and verbal abuse.
- Nationally, only 50% of disabled people of working age are employed, compared to 81% of non-disabled people. For some impairment groups the rates are even lower – only 21% of people with long term mental health conditions are working.
- The Disability Rights Commission estimates that as people are living longer and medical treatments are improving, by the year 2020, 1 in 3 people will be living with a physical, sensory or learning impairment.

Locally:

- The Cumbria Attitude Survey completed in 2004, highlighted that in general disabled people were confident that they would receive fair treatment from public services, with some noticeable exceptions – leisure and recreation, local councils and housing services.
- The 2001 Census highlights that in Carlisle 19.3% of the population had a long term limiting illness – a higher percentage than England as a whole but lower than the North West. Whilst the percentage varies from ward to ward, 8 of Carlisle's 22 wards have percentages of over 20%. According to the Department for Work and Pensions figures for 2005, 5.2% of the population in Carlisle are claiming disability allowance – higher than the percentage for England as a whole but lower than the claimant count for the North West Region.

Involving Disabled People

We recognise that there is much more to be done in terms of the involvement of disabled people in the development, implementation and review of the Disability Equality Scheme and its action plan. Carlisle City Council is in discussion with Cumbria County Council, the Carlisle Diversity Partnership, Cumbria Disability Network and the Carlisle Access Group about the most effective mechanisms for doing this.

We have tried to ensure that disabled people have been involved in:

- Identifying the barriers in our services that result in less than satisfactory outcomes;
- In setting priorities for action; and
- Advising on the content of the action plan.

Specifically, disabled people have been involved in the development of this scheme through the Carlisle Access Group.

. The draft document itself was circulated to a number of local agencies for their comments, see Appendix 1.

Our future plans for consultation are detailed in the Democratic Participation and Involvement section of the Action Plan but an important area of work for the Council will be in identifying criteria for prioritising impact assessment.

Approach to Impact Assessment

The purpose of impact assessment is to ensure that the Council does not disadvantage disabled people, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and importantly to identify where the Council can promote equality of opportunity. It could be described as a disability equality risk assessment.

For Carlisle City Council it will be the process by which we can systematically identify the changes we need to make and then take action to better promote disability equality and improve access to services.

- The Council has completed a schedule of its functions, supporting policies and practices and is currently prioritising these for impact assessment. When the prioritising exercise is complete a copy will be attached as an Appendix to the scheme. We will seek advice from disabled people to help us identify some criteria for prioritising our activities for impact assessment.

The criteria adopted to guide the prioritisation of activities for impact assessments will be identified in liaison with disabled people.

The Council's approach to impact assessment is currently being developed and will involve:

- Consideration of the available data;
- An assessment of the effect of the policy or decision, or of existing programmes and policies, on disabled people;
- An assessment of any shortfall in take up by disabled people; and
- A consideration of the measures which might mitigate adverse impact and alternative options that might better achieve equality of opportunity.

Regular review of the Council's impact assessment work will be carried out by the Corporate Equality Group on a quarterly basis. The outcomes of the impact assessments will be reported on completion on the Council's website.

Action to meet the duty to promote disability equality – the Action Plan

We are starting from a relatively low level of understanding of the experience of disabled people locally, so many of our activities need to be concentrated on better understanding of the impact of our activities and the gaps that exist. This **first action plan** will, therefore be reviewed in 12 months time.

Good practice elsewhere suggests that our actions need to be focussed on seven core areas and our action plan reflects this approach:

- Leadership, staffing and strategy;

- Building access and the built environment;
- Communications;
- Training;
- Service delivery;
- Employment; and
- Involving disabled people.

Once the plan is reviewed it will include actions linked to the strategic priorities of the Council for example - business milestones and major projects. The success of the Council's Action Plan will be reviewed against appropriate measures – these will be developed in discussion with disabled people during the first 12 months of the scheme..

Gathering and using information

The Council needs information which it can use to assess progress in relation to disability equality – specifically we need to measure progress against the action plan.

Regulation 2(3)(d)(i) states that the Council should identify how it will gather information on how its policies affect recruitment, development and retention of disabled employees.

Regulation 2(3)(d)(iii) states that we must set out our arrangements for gathering information on the extent to which the services we provide and the functions we carry out take account of the needs of disabled people.

Currently, the Council collects little information on uptake of services, we need to remedy this if we are to effectively monitor improvements in relation to disability equality. The action plan includes activities designed to improve our information gathering.

As a minimum we will ensure that disabled people are properly reflected in any customer surveys and local focus groups. Our analysis will ensure that any gaps between disabled and non-disabled people are identified. In addition, the information collected will be used to inform impact assessment and the review of the disability equality scheme.

Implementation of the Disability Equality Scheme

The Disability Equality Scheme must be reviewed every three years – this task will become the responsibility of the Council's Corporate Equality Group, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive. Regular monitoring of the progress on the action plan will also be the responsibility of this group. Mechanisms for reporting progress to disabled people still need to be identified.

On an annual basis, the Council will publish a report outlining:

- The steps that the Council has taken to promote disability equality and to meet our targets;
- The results of any information gathering; and
- What the Council has done with the information.

This report will be published as part of the Council's Best Value Performance Plan.

The Council will publish a revised Disability Equality Scheme by the 4th December 2007, with a further revision in December 2009 and every three years thereafter.

Councillor J. Geddis has been identified as a member champion for disability.

Appendix 1 – Stakeholder agencies circulated

Action for Blind People
Age Concern
Alzheimer's Society Carlisle
Suite 1, Belle Vue Business Centre
British Heart Foundation (Northern)
Cardiac Rehabilitation Action Group
Carlisle & District Remap
Carlisle & Eden Deaf Children's Society
Carlisle Carers Association
Carlisle Mencap
Carlisle Mind
Carlisle People First Ltd
Carlisle Play for All
Carlisle Shopmobility
9 Brunswick Street
Carlisle Talking Newspapers
Logic House
Cumbria Deaf Association
Disability Association Carlisle & Eden (DACE)
Down's Syndrome Association
Epilepsy Support Group
Friends of Orton Lea
Glenmore Trust
Headway North Cumbria
Making Space (Carers Group)
Motor Neurone Disease Association
Multiple Sclerosis (Carlisle)
North Cumbria Dyslexia Association
Parkinson's Disease Society (Carlisle Branch)
Rukba (Royal UK Beneficent Association)
Say It Service

PROJECT DETAILS					
Work Programme:	To ensure the Council meets its duty: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons; To eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act; To eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disabilities; To promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons; To encourage participation by disabled persons in public life; To take steps to take account of disabled person's disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons. 			Statutory:	Yes
Work description:	This action sets out the key actions the Council will take to promote disability equality.				
Responsible Officer:					
Start date:	December 2006	Planned end date:	December 2007	Latest end date:	December 2007

Leadership, staffing and strategy			
Key Work Stream/Area	Target Date	Who	Resources/ Support required
Identify a member of the Executive to hold the disability equality brief.	Complete	Cllr J Ged dis	Existing
Identify a Senior Management Team member to have overall responsibility for the implementation of the duty to promote disability equality.			
Delegate specific responsibilities in the Action Plan to individual service heads, where the remit falls within their service area.			
Adopt Social Model of Disability.	Complete		Existing
Include considerations of disability equality into scrutiny, Executive and SMT meetings.			
Work within the Local Government Equality Standard.			
Carry out a questionnaire survey of disabled people.	Feb./Mar 2007		
Host a conference on DES - 6 months on.			
Disseminate staff briefing note.	Now		

Building access and the built environment			
Key Work Stream/Area	Target Date	Who	Resources/ Support required
Carry out an access audit of Council facilities. Monitoring of existing and proposed buildings for use by disabled people.			
Undertake access audit of website.			
Consider accessibility of venues as a key component for future hiring.			
Ensure that the access needs of disabled people are incorporated into the work of Carlisle Renaissance.			

Communications			
Key Work Stream/Area	Target Date	Who	Resources/ Support required
All information should be available in a number of formats – process needs clarity about financial costs. Once a request received the person should receive all future communications in this format.			
Ensure that there is full awareness of the Communications Guidance.			
Develop suitable web pages with links to other useful organisations.			
Monitor uptake of British Sign Language pilot.		PPP	

Encourage Customer Contact Centre staff to undertake British Sign Language training.			
Publish Disability Equality Scheme in a range of formats.			

Training			
Key Work Stream/Area	Target Date	Who	Resources/ Support required
Disability Awareness Training for SMT and service heads.			
Disability Awareness Training for elected members.			
Identify how disability awareness training will be built into Induction training for all staff.			
Investigate how knowledge/understanding of disability equality can be built into performance appraisal and personal development.			
Review disability awareness training for staff.			

Service delivery			
Key Work Stream/Area	Target Date	Who	Resources/ Support required
Identify for inclusion in scheme, what the Council already does to promote disability equality			
Identify a schedule of impact assessments covering three years of the scheme – must tie into those for the race equality scheme – use disabled people's views to determine the programme.			
All new policies to be impact assessed using the guidance document (to be completed shortly.)			
Individual service areas to have responsibility for these – include in service plans – awareness training and impact assessment training will need to be scheduled in.			
Improve service-monitoring data – to include mechanisms covering complaints, satisfaction and customer comments.			
Identify a mechanism for gathering information on recruitment, development and retention of disabled employees.			
Adopt minimum access standards for public events, include investigation of access requirements at polling stations.			
Include disability requirements into procurement arrangements – contracts, commissioning and partnerships.			
Investigate recruitment practice – follow up on concerns of CROS.			

Employment			
Key Work Stream/Area	Target Date	Who	Resources/ Support required
Ensure that disabled people are represented at all levels of the workforce – examine reasons why this is not the case to remove any barriers.			
Ensure clear and accessible recruitment systems – availability of application form in a number of formats.			
Ensure proper monitoring arrangements are in place and that the information is published on an annual basis.			
Facilitate a focus group/ discussion group for disabled members of staff.			
Investigate an employment initiative partnership with Carlisle Renaissance and Carlisle Housing Association.			
Consider the use of positive action schemes to increase the ratio of disabled people in the workforce.			

Democratic participation and involvement of disabled people			
Key Work Stream/Area	Target Date	Who	Resources/ Support required
Discuss with disabled people how they would like to be more actively involved in decision-making.			
Investigate the involvement of disabled people in the LSP, Carlisle Renaissance and other decision making bodies.			
Ensure that public meetings are fully accessible (not just for certain impairment groups) and at times convenient to community members. Use of plain English formats. Recognise that for some groups separate meetings will be required.			
Ensure that appropriate communications support is in place.			
Facilitate a disabled staff focus group to concentrate on Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan.			
Involve elected members and senior managers in activities which engage disabled people.			