

**Disability Equality Scheme
and Action Plan
2006 - 2009**



**Leicester
City Council**

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DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME 2006 - 2009

Foreword

This is Leicester City Council's first Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan, arising from the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, which comes into force on 4 December 2006. The scheme is an integral part of the Council's corporate equality strategy. We have adopted an integrated equalities approach and see the continuous development of the Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan as a key element of this work.

We are proud of Leicester's diverse population and value disabled people, their contribution to the life and diversity of our city, and to society as a whole. Councillors and officers share a commitment to ensure that we provide the community leadership and Council services required to improve the quality of life for people in this city. Our commitment to disability equality is a key element of this approach.

We are committed to ensuring disability equality both in our service provision and as an employer. This Scheme and Action Plan sets out how we intend to improve the way in which we promote disability equality and therefore better serve disabled people.

There are already a number of existing initiatives in the Council which promote disability equality. However, we recognise the need to continue to mainstream current good practice and will develop further initiatives to improve our services to disabled people.

The involvement of disabled people undertaken in the production of the scheme and action plan forms a key part of developing our work against discrimination and building a shared city-wide commitment to equality.

Disability equality is an important issue for us as at least a quarter of the city's population is made up of disabled people and their close friends and relatives.

We welcome the opportunity to involve the disabled people of Leicester in setting new standards of service delivery and look forward to achieving positive outcomes together.

(- for signature by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive)

1. Introduction

1.1 The Council has a new statutory responsibility, called the Disability Equality Duty, under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, to promote disability equality in the provision of its services (both those directly provided and those provided through contractors) and as an employer.

1.2 The purpose of the Disability Equality Scheme is to clarify the Council's approach to disability equality and the actions it will take to promote the equality of disabled people, and to prevent unlawful discrimination and the harassment of disabled people that is related to their disability.

1.3 It is important that all staff across the Council understand and implement the same approach. The Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan outline the work that will be needed to develop this common understanding and approach to customer care, employee care, and service provision.

1.4 The Disability Equality Scheme sets out the Council's arrangements for:

- Assessing, consulting on, and monitoring its functions and policies for any adverse impact on promoting disability equality, and for taking timely action to remove any adverse impact
- Involving disabled people in these processes
- Publishing a three-year action plan on disability equality, reporting on it and updating it every year
- Making sure that its services are accessible to disabled people
- Training staff.

1.5 The current legislation has arisen from the government's recognition that disabled people experience significant disadvantage and discrimination in comparison with non-disabled people.

1.6 For example:

- Disabled people in employment are more likely to work in manual and lower-skilled or unskilled occupations, and less likely to work in managerial, professional and high-skilled occupations.
- The average gross hourly pay of disabled employees is about 10 per cent less than that of non-disabled employees.

- Disabled people are still only half as likely as non-disabled people to be qualified to degree level and are twice as likely as non-disabled people to have no qualification at all.

1.7 The Disability Equality Duty recognises the need to ensure equal opportunities for disabled people and to challenge outdated attitudes and prejudice towards disabled people and disability. Thus it places a responsibility on public bodies, as the largest providers of employment and services, to ensure that disabled people get a fair deal and can take a full part in economic, social, cultural and civic life.

1.8 To achieve this we must work towards the changes in attitudes and practices which will remove the barriers that result in discrimination against disabled people.

1.9 A barrier-free society would benefit from the talents and contributions of all its citizens, and enable disabled people to take their place in all aspects of community and public life – the right to be included and involved.

1.10 Most of all, a barrier-free society would welcome disabled people, promote disabled people's rights to independence and full participation, and value their contributions as citizens.

2. The Council's commitment to equality for disabled people

2.1 The Council's Corporate Equality Strategy and Action Plan (CESAP) contains the following equal opportunities statement:

'Leicester City Council continues its commitment to equality of opportunity and the elimination of discrimination for all people regardless of age, colour, disability, ethnic or national origin, gender, marital status, race, religion and religious belief, sexuality, or trade union membership. We are committed to promoting equality in respect of our role as a service provider, our role as an employer, and our role as community leaders.' (p.5)

2.2 Therefore, we will be responsive and open, and demonstrate both quality and equality to our citizens, to our service users and to those who visit our city. We will ensure that disabled and non-disabled people alike can participate fully in and benefit from the social, cultural, economic and decision-making life of the city.

2.3 The Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan are focused solely on disabled people and their needs in order to ensure equal access to services and employment, though it must be remembered that everyone benefits when equalities objectives are achieved, and that all Council staff have a duty to ensure that this happens.

3. The Strategic Framework for the Disability Equality Scheme

3.1 The Corporate Equality Strategy presents an overall framework informing elected members, staff, external partners and residents how the Council seeks to ensure that the elimination of discrimination and promotion of equal opportunities underlies both its employment practices and its service delivery.

4. What we have to do

4.1 The Disability Equality Scheme sets out how the Council will put into action its general and specific duties arising from the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 to:

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people
- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act
- Eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disability
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life
- Take steps to meet disabled people's needs, even if this requires more favourable treatment.

(Doing the Duty, Disability Rights Commission, p. 2)

5. Who is responsible?

5.1 These duties are the responsibility of every Council employee, not just those whose work brings them into contact with identified disabled people who receive our services, or with disabled work colleagues. Many people, for instance, have a hidden disability. All employees can influence how the Council and others view disabled people and disability issues, and can help to promote disability equality, however indirectly.

5.2 Our responsibility for disability equality also includes those whom we contract or commission to deliver services to disabled people on our

behalf. It is our duty to ensure that they too, deliver service according to agreed standards.

5.3 So we must:

- Meet our legal obligations – and exceed them if at all possible – by:
- Involving disabled people in our policy making, service planning, delivery, monitoring and review
- Finding out what disabled people most need (disabled people's service delivery priorities)
- Ensuring that services make life better for disabled people
- Explaining how disabled people can make their views known on issues which affect them, such as planning and transport
- Ensuring that we ourselves, and those delivering services to disabled people on our behalf, act in accordance with recognised best practice on disability equality
- Monitoring our progress and telling disabled people what has been achieved, on a regular basis.

6. Responsibility as an employer to:

- Give all staff a positive understanding of disability equality and the terms 'disabled' and 'disability' so that all employees have a clear role to play and a responsibility for delivering the Disability Equality Duty
- Give staff the opportunity to declare themselves as a disabled person within an organisational culture which is informed, understanding, supportive, and free from negative bias, harassment, bullying and discrimination
- Meet the reasonable access needs of disabled employees and potential employees, including at the advertisement and recruitment stages
- Provide support for employees who become disabled
- Monitor the number of disabled people who are Council employees, as well as the number leaving the Council's employment
- Positively promote employment to disabled people.

7. As an employer, we will promote equality of opportunity between disabled and non-disabled employees, so that:

- All employees are aware of, understand and value the importance and significance of having a diverse workforce, which includes disabled people

- All employees understand fully the need to make reasonable adjustments in order to improve access for disabled people in employment and service delivery
- We take account of disabled people's disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than other people
- We eliminate harassment of disabled employees that is related to their disability
- Disabled employees feel confident that any complaint of discrimination, harassment or bullying will be taken through to a fair and satisfactory outcome.

8. Access

8.1 Many people associate the term 'access' with physical access to buildings such as ramps or lifts. This is only part of the picture. A broader and better understanding of the term encompasses how all disabled people access goods, services, facilities and information as well as buildings.

8.2 Access needs are better thought of as any reasonable improvement or adjustment which enables a disabled employee to carry out their job or a disabled service user to receive the same high quality level of service as a non-disabled person.

8.3 Access needs include a range of improvements from the provision of large font or easy to read documents to appropriate customer service practices or the availability of a hearing loop service. There are many other ways in which employment and services can be made accessible to disabled people. Some represent a worthwhile investment and many others are low-cost or cost-free.

8.4 Perhaps the most significant improvement in access will occur when people think inclusively, so that disabled people's access to information, goods, services, buildings and employment is built into the policy, business and service planning processes rather than added on at the end. To be successful, this will also require changes in attitude towards disabled people and to disability in order to ensure barrier-free access and full disability equality.

8.5 We have a legal duty to **anticipate** that disabled people will want to use our services and we should plan to make changes so that they are able to do so. Legislation requires that we should not wait until a

disabled person tells us they want to use our services before we consider making changes.

8.6 The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 requires all public authorities to promote equal opportunities for disabled people so that disabled people have equal chances to contribute to society and to receive the services they need. In some situations, this will mean disabled people being treated more favourably than non-disabled people in order to make those chances equal.

9. The social model of disability

9.1 There are two generally recognised models of disability, the social model and the medical model.

9.2 The social model is based upon the understanding that barriers faced by disabled people are created by society, and the lack of recognition of the needs of disabled people in accessing goods, services, buildings, facilities and information.

9.3 The medical model defines disability in terms of mental and / or physical impairment, so that the barriers encountered by a disabled person are the products of recognised medical conditions.

9.4 Many people, both disabled and non-disabled, reject the medical model on the basis that it fails to recognise that many of the barriers to disability equality are attitudinal, and are the products of lack of knowledge and understanding, fear, and of discrimination.

9.5 The social model recognises the barrier, not the impairment, and responds positively by consulting with the disabled person and involving them in decision-making, in order to meet their needs.

9.6 The Council adopted the social model of disability in 2002.

10. Leicester's population of disabled people

10.1 The profile of disabled people who access our services is continually changing. Numbers are expected to increase as the population ages, and as a direct result of the new legislation, which widens the definition of disability (see Appendix 1 for the new definition). A continually updated composite overview of the changing profile of the

city's disabled people and their access needs is required to provide better information for decision makers and service providers.

10.2 The overall profile indicates that 18.8% of the population of Leicester as a whole and 15% of people of working age have a limiting long-term illness (2001 Census). 'Limiting long-term illness' covers any long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits daily activity or work.

11. Service delivery outcomes

11.1 What we will do:

- The Council has integrated legislative requirements on equality matters within its employment and service planning processes and will review these to include the new legislative requirements on disability equality.
- The Council will improve its monitoring of service take-up and demographic profiles of service users, in order to better identify gaps in service provision, thereby improving access for disabled people to Council services.
- The Council will review its consultation strategy and incorporate into the toolkit guidelines for communicating with and involving disabled people.
- The Council will work with voluntary, public and private sector partners to develop best practice in disability equality in employment and service delivery within the Council itself and across the city as a whole.
- The Council will develop more inclusive and accessible communication mechanisms and will keep employees, service users, and interested stakeholders informed of its progress in promoting disability equality as specified in the Action Plan.

12. How disabled people were involved in producing our Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan

12.1 A key aim in producing the Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan is to involve disabled people directly in creating corporate priorities for service delivery to both disabled citizens and Council employees.

12.2 What we did:

- We engaged with our strategic advisor on disability issues, who is a disabled person, to establish how best to do this, contacted a variety

of disabled people's organisations and individuals, and held four Involvement Days for local disabled people.

- We employed trained facilitators and scribes, who are themselves disabled people, to work with participants in establishing corporate priorities for service delivery.
- Disabled people themselves chose which aspects of service to focus on, and no non-disabled people or Council employees took part in the involvement sessions.
- An additional day was run with disabled employees on the same basis to establish their priorities.
- This corporate approach to involvement, along with similar appropriate approaches, will be used in departments.
- The priorities established will be used to inform actions taken by council departments through their policies and strategies, business, and service plans.

13. How we gather and use information

13.1 At present, we do not have accurate statistical information about disabled people in the city to whom our services are delivered and could be delivered in the future. Departments which deliver services specifically for disabled people tend to have better information.

13.2 We will collect better information about disabled people and use it specifically to improve service delivery to individuals and to disabled people generally. We will review and develop our data collection methods in line with the requirements of the Level 4 Equalities Standard and the Corporate Performance Assessment.

13.3 In addition to the general equalities information currently collected, we will ask disabled people to give us more specific information about their access needs. We will seek guidance from the Disability Rights Commission and best practice examples to inform our data collection methods.

13.4 Departments will need to consider whether to collect information about disabled people's impairments, if they can justify that they need to do this in order to improve service delivery. Information from departments' Equality Impact Assessments can be used to assess the appropriateness of collecting data on impairment, and we will seek guidance on how best to do this.

14. Equality Impact Assessments

14.1 Each department conducts Equality Impact Assessments in accordance with departmental programmes and includes identified actions in departmental equality action plans. This will provide the added value of identifying actions which need to be mainstreamed for all rather than included solely for disabled people within a particular service.

14.2 In carrying out Equality Impact Assessments, departments will identify gaps in service delivery and adverse impacts of existing and proposed policies and practice in relation to disability equality, in accordance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and in line with guidance issued by the Disability Rights Commission.

15. How the Disability Equality Scheme will be implemented

15.1 Disabled people's priorities will inform our implementation of the Disability Equality Scheme and will be incorporated into departmental service plans and equality action plans.

15.2 A rolling programme of corporate staff training in disability equality will begin for managers and key service deliverers. Departmental equality action plans will identify the service-specific disability equality training required and the timetable for delivery.

16. Annual reporting system

16.1 Disabled people will be involved in the processes of setting targets and assessing progress, and the timetable for co-ordinating this activity will be centrally organised.

16.2 Progress on achieving disability equality will be published annually and departments will contribute to a corporate report. Departmental and corporate reports will feature revised, rolling three-year targets using current systems and formats on reporting performance.

16.3 Departments will monitor their progress regularly in order to ensure that the actions identified are achieving objectives, and if not, take early action on these.

17. What will happen to the Disability Equality Scheme next year

17.1 We are required to review the scheme and action plan annually. In this first year, we will carry out an interim review after six months. We will continue to involve disabled people in action planning and performance review so that, at the end of the year we will be in a position to strengthen the targets for 2008 and further shape those for 2009.

18. How the Disability Equality Scheme will be published

18.1 The Disability Equality Scheme will appear on the Council's website, intranet, and on the Disability Information Network in pdf, large print (hard and electronic copy), audio and picture format. We will use existing and new resources in a timetabled programme of internal and external publicity.

18.2 Copies will be sent to all participants in the Involvement Days and to all known local organisations of and for disabled people. Copies will also be available from Customer Service Centres and other Council outlets. We will use existing and new distribution systems to ensure a wide and appropriate coverage.

Contact us

We would like to know what you think. If you have any comments or questions about the Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan, please contact:

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