

**DISABILITY EQUALITY ACTION PLAN (2006-2009) - SECOND YEAR
PROGRESS REPORT**

Summary of Key Achievements during 2008 and Priorities for 2009

1. Increased Disability Equality Awareness & Training

The Council's Partnership Assessment Questionnaire has been modified to ensure compliance with the equalities duties including the disability duty.

The Employee Disability Forum was launched in January 2008. The Forum has appointed a Chair and holds regular, user-led meetings. Administrative support is provided by a personnel officer. Since its establishment, the Employee Disability Forum has acted as a sounding board for many policy decisions including providing useful feedback on aspects of recruitment and selection. A representative from the Forum is now a member of the Personnel Policies Group.

New employees have received equalities awareness sessions as part of their corporate induction training. The awareness session includes the viewing of an award winning, in-house DVD.

The Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership's Citizens' Panel was refreshed in spring 2008. 20 % of the new Panel have a disability; this level of representation reflects the estimated ratio of disabled people in the wider population.

2. Improved Access to Information and Services

Our Finance service engaged in a targeted benefit take-up campaign, which assisted disabled pensioners within Aberdeenshire to claim and receive Attendance Allowance that they may otherwise have been unaware they were entitled to. In addition, this allowed entitlement in some cases to Pension Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. This exercise was a joint working project with the Pension Service and is ongoing as detailed in Action number 8 under the Finance Service Action Plan (Appendix 2).

Planning information packs now include a suite of information pamphlets which provide useful guides on completing planning applications. This is aimed at improving the quality of applications and consequently the service we provide to our customers across Aberdeenshire.

A review of the most commonly spoken minority ethnic languages over the 18 months to October 2008 was undertaken. This will help to target provision of information in alternative languages and formats including British Sign Language (BSL).

New staff guidance on meeting the communication support needs of service users has been developed by the Corporate Communications Unit.

There has been progress in conducting access audits and linking this information to physical assets to inform the Asset Management Strategy for Council Services. This allows more effective targeting of resources and has

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helped to develop the programme of DDA compliance works for public buildings.

3. Improved Communication

Our Corporate Communications Unit has developed the following Guides/Tools to improve communication and consultation with the general public including disabled people:

- Corporate Communications Strategy
- Consultations Toolkit – a quick reference guide on carrying out consultations
- Consultation Action Plan to 2010
- Consultations database – where all ongoing consultations are logged. This is intended to improve information sharing across council services, to ensure more efficient consultation activities and to reduce consultation fatigue for our residents and stakeholders.

As an outcome of the research into: "Understanding the Housing and Support Needs of People with a Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment" the Housing and Social Work Service has identified communication methods for inclusion in the Housing Communications Strategy. This information is being used to inform the development of an Outcome Statement which will cover a number of community care groups.

4. Positive links with Organisations off/for Disabled People

The Disability Equality Scheme Monitoring group comprises representatives of the Employee Disability Forum; a cross section of policy, management and personnel officers; and representatives of local disabled people from the North and South of Aberdeenshire.

The Equalities Officer maintained good links with the Equality & Human Rights Commission - EHRC, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities - CosLA, and the Scottish Equalities Officers Network – SCEN, for sharing of information and good practice. A database of local disability groups and contacts is being developed.

News Releases are circulated to local Press, Aberdeenshire weeklies and broadcast media. The Corporate Communications Unit has direct contact with local Talking Papers.

5. Training of equalities impact assessors

Our in-house multi equalities impact assessment toolkit has been reviewed and revised to incorporate three stages: Screening; Partial; and Full impact assessments. Service leads on equalities impact assessment have been identified and trained to offer support to other colleagues and roll out impact assessments within their Services.

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A cross section of policy authors from the Services have undertaken the corporate Multi Equalities Impact Assessment training and are starting to build impact assessments into emerging policies and plans such as the Council's Strategic Priorities Plan & the Corporate Communications Strategy which were impact assessed in May/June 2008.

A further list of policies and functions has been drawn up for screening and impact assessment in 2009. Tailored training is available & delivered to new teams of impact assessors as the need arises.

Priorities for 2009

1. Increase Disability Equality Awareness & Training

Continue to raise disability awareness among employees, elected members and other stakeholders through targeted training and other activities including a more joined up approach to equalities e.g. through the development of a Multi Equalities Scheme.

Achieve 95% return rate of monitoring forms to identify disability statistics within the workforce

2. Improved Access to Information and Services

Continue the targeted benefit take up campaign, moving on to other areas of benefit, for example, to assist Carers of disabled people and to promoting Housing Benefit / Council Tax benefit and ensuring income maximisation. Identify how to provide services in alternative media when requested.

Complete *access audits* in the areas not yet covered and deliver the programme of compliance works.

Ensure progress in identifying and opening 'Changing Places facilities' in suitable venues across Aberdeenshire to enhance access to leisure facilities for disabled persons.

Undertake an audit of best practice nationally in the use of "Access Statements" to improve accessibility of significant projects. This should be made possible by the ongoing actions taken to implement the Planning Scotland Act 2008 and the reduction in the staffing problems which hindered progress during 2007/08.

Develop strategies for Older Person's Housing, Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment, and Care at Home with the assistance of technology in line with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 & the Disability Equality Duty 2006.

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Continue to develop a Local Investment Framework to ensure achievement of the Local Housing Strategy's Strategic Objective 7 - To ensure a minimum of 30% of new affordable homes are developed to meet identified particular needs per year (15% for older people, 7% for physical disabilities, 5% for learning disabilities & other care groups and 3% for homelessness). This target was not met during 07/08, therefore will form a priority for the future.

Identify how to provide services in alternative media when requested.

3. Improve Communication

Implement the Housing Customer Feedback Framework, identified from the Housing and Social Work AIM session, to look at a Service User and Carer Involvement Strategy.

4. Strengthen Positive links with Disabled People and relevant Organisations

Increase membership, and develop involvement of the Tenants Participation Armchair Group in consultation and information dissemination. The last update showed that the membership had remained at 36.

Continue to identify and develop links with local disability groups and organisations, and ensure increased involvement and participation by disabled people in relevant Council activities and decision-making processes.

Arrange a providers' fair, in partnership with other public sector organisations, to identify potential role/s for disability organisations.

5. Progress Equalities Impact Assessments

Accelerate the process of multi equalities impact assessments of relevant policies and functions.

Complete all priority 1 multi equalities impact assessments where possible.

Education Priorities for 2009

Further training in the lifting and handling of pupils; and for escorts accompanying children on school transport.

Continue to develop and implement guidelines for the deployment of Support for Learning teachers

Continue to offer CPD opportunities for all staff to promote education practice to reflect Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)

Establish a database of children with physical access needs through SEEMIS and continue to develop a database of mobility equipment.

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Improve a further five schools for physical access and further implement the Curriculum for Excellence giving improved access to the curriculum for pupils with disabilities.

Continue work on including the views of children in the delivery of education provision and continue to work with People First and Aberdeenshire Disability Action to improve positive attitudes towards disabled people.

Progress equalities impact assessments.