

## Appendix 3

### DES Involvement Process

Disabled People have been involved in a meaningful and equal way throughout the development of Aberdeenshire Council's Disability Equality Scheme.

The starting point for the development of the Scheme was the formation of a Development Group as a partnership between disabled people and Council Officers. This group was made up of;

Keith Weeks –Aberdeenshire Council, Project Officer.

Linda Miller – Access Panel Director, Scottish Disability Equality Forum.

Kevin Hutchens –Aberdeenshire Council/ Union Representative.

Yvonne MacDonald – Executive Officer, Aberdeenshire Disability Action.

Mercy Yoar – Aberdeenshire Council, Policy Officer (Equalities)

Dennis Robertson – Team Leader, Grampian Society for the Blind.

Vaughan Jennings – Aberdeenshire Council, Education Service.

Tony Miller---- Chair, Disabled Persons Housing Service Aberdeenshire.

Pat Dinwoodie – Aberdeenshire Council, Sensory Services Manager.

Ann-Marie Grant – Local disability activist, carer.

Sheena Swinhoe ---- See Below

Sally Wilkins -----Aberdeenshire Council Social Work.

Kate Connor ---- Aberdeenshire Council, Head of Development and Training.

During the Action Planning stage of the development of the Scheme Maurice Parkin, Chair, Aberdeenshire Disability Action gave input to the group via the Project Officer as his impairment did not allow attendance at the meetings in person.

This group oversaw the development of the Scheme and the involvement of disabled people. The makeup of the group constituted direct involvement in its own right at the heart of the development process.

## **Involvement Events**

The group initiated three involvement events across Aberdeenshire. These were held at Turriff, Aberdeen and Aboyne. Approximately 100 groups and individuals were invited to attend, these groups and individuals representing a wide range of impairments, with 44 contributing on the days and a further 4 remotely during the same time scale. Accessible premises were selected and a range of communication support made available including loop systems, projected text of presentations, easyread summaries and large print versions of materials. These met the needs of the attendees as expressed in their returned information sheets and all were able to contribute on the day. Travel expenses were paid, lunch provided and expenses available for such things as childcare etc as laid out in our volunteer Policy if these were required.

Packs were provided with information on the Disability Equality Duty in appropriate formats and the small group facilitators assisted the groups to focus on the promotion of equality and issues related to the Scheme.

Attendees were welcomed to the event with an outline of the needs of the Council presented by the Head of Training, Head of Policy and Equalities Officer respectively at the three venues. This was followed by a presentation on the Duty and the place the event had in the production of the Scheme given by Linda Miller, (Access Panel Director, Scottish Disability Equality Forum) stressing the importance of engaging with involvement in the promotion of Equality of Opportunity.

The attendees worked in small groups facilitated by members of the Development Group using worksheets to consider barriers to equality, more favourable treatment of disabled people, what information we should collect to show how we were promoting disability equality and how disabled people could get involved in checking how well we provide our services.

After a break for lunch the groups met again to work through questions regarding further involvement. These included: how would you want to take part in taking the scheme forward, what support would you need to take part, what needs to be done to get others to take part. At all stages comment beyond the questions was encouraged and participants were encouraged to comment on the broader issues facing the Council as well as issues relating to service provision. Organisational representatives were encouraged to give their personal input in addition to that expressed on behalf of their organisation.

The strongest element coming out of the days was that of how we act to overcome “institutional” barriers to equality as a priority. The six strongest expressions of this are listed in our scheme and are used to guide the priorities used in its contents.

In addition to the main elements single expressions of particular issues arose, many regarding personal responses to service provision. None of these occurred consistently enough to provide a clear pattern but all were recorded and will be circulated to Services, as they may be useful in informing the prioritisation of Impact assessments and possible service reviews.

The attendee group were overwhelmingly made up of disabled people, even those representing organisations. A wide range of impairments were represented including sight and hearing impairment, mobility impairment /wheelchair users, learning difficulty, MS, asthma and attendees with “hidden impairments” covered by the 2005 Act. Attendees ranged in age from post retiral to under 10’s and were a broadly equal mix of male and female.

Organisations represented were:

Deeside Access Panel  
Gordon Rural Action  
Central Aberdeenshire Access Panel  
Buchan Dial a Community Bus  
Can-do Community Recycling  
Grampian Society for the Blind  
Grampian Racial Equality Council  
Redeployment  
Banff Network  
PAMIS  
Aberdeenshire Disability Action  
Aberdeenshire South Access Panel

19 of the attendees were there in their individual capacity as disabled people. Many of these are active in the local disabled community and are members of various organisations in their own right and bring this wider experience of disability issues to the table in their personal views.

In recognition of the fact that such events are not the best format for some groups to attend (notably people with learning difficulties and people with mental health issues) individual visits were made to LARC (an organisation in South Aberdeenshire of and for People with learning difficulties). The National Schizophrenia Fellowship at their Arches drop in at Banff and People First Fraserburgh (an organisation promoting self-advocacy for people with learning difficulties). The worksheets were used in small group work as at the events but tailored to the speed and communication needs of these groups. These visits were carried out by the Project Officer who has a background in work with community groups and organisations run by people with learning difficulties.

The main priorities expressed in these involvement days are included in the Scheme and identifiably inform its content, demonstrating a direct response to the priorities of disabled people in Aberdeenshire.

Attendees were given the opportunity to sign up for further involvement ranging from reviewing the draft of the scheme through acting as a contact for an organisation or attending future events to just receiving further information. Twenty Four attendees wished to undertake further involvement. There was an “other” option where some attendees requested training in Impact Assessment. (These names have been forwarded to our Training Section)

## **Involvement in Action Planning**

The development group set up a one month process to assist Services with the production of their action plans. This took the form of three workshops with two weeks between each. Representatives were selected by each Service and received preparatory information on the Act. At the first workshop a presentation was given by Mercy Yoar, Policy Officer (Equalities) on the Scheme and the place of action plans in it. The Service representatives then worked through the process of determining actions with reference to the six elements of the Duty and the priorities expressed by the disabled residents of Aberdeenshire. This work was carried out across the table from members of the Development Group ensuring that all services had the opportunity to work with disabled members of the group and benefit from their experience and knowledge. This workshop format was repeated mid way and at the end of the month period, with the development group community members able to work with service representatives as their plans were developing. The action plans were developed with the direct input from informed disabled people working in partnership with Service representatives and considering the six strands of the duty through the priorities set by community involvement.

## **Involvement of Employees**

Of the eight permanent employee members of the Development Group who drew up the Scheme two would be considered disabled under the 2005 Act by virtue of a long-term medical condition. These members brought that experience to their input to the scheme and their ongoing work with the group.

An invitation for disabled employees to take part in an involvement event as part of the development of our Scheme was sent to 4500 of our employees. This resulted in 13 expressions of interest. An event day was organised at a central accessible location and those expressing interest invited, on the day 9 chose to attend. Attendance was considered paid work time, managers were expected to allow time to attend and lunch and travel expenses provided.

The day took the form of small round table discussion groups with an initial scene setting and explanatory session from the Project officer. The groups were facilitated by disabled members of the Development Group and a Trades Union Representative. The groups worked via a series of six topics, each one a strand of the General Duty (equality of opportunity, discrimination, harassment, positive attitudes, public life and meeting needs). The facilitator recorded the conclusions of the free ranging discussions. Delegates were encouraged to examine their knowledge and personal experiences and relate these to the underlying issues that may lead to actions benefiting the wider disabled workforce

The scheme acknowledges the historical missed opportunity of not having a structured and representative Employee Disability Forum within the workforce of Aberdeenshire Council. Employees attending the event were asked to indicate if they were willing to engage in a range of further involvements. Included in these was the option to be part of the proposed Employees Disability Forum. Of the 9 attending the day all agreed to consider membership of the Forum these employees had a range of impairments including mobility, sensory, MS and

“hidden impairment” such as dyslexia, epilepsy and diabetes. Personnel will work with this core group to develop a Forum that will represent the range of impairments represented in our workforce in a meaningful and independent way. The comments and issues resulting from the round table discussions were collated and circulated to all Service Reps to inform the Service Action Plans.

The returns from the event were dominated by:

Communication issues – How to communicate with such a dispersed workforce,

Training Issues – training for managers etc in understanding legislation and disability issues in general

Accessibility Issues – provision of adjustments (parking, software etc)

There was strong support for, Employee Disability Forum, Disability Leave and Disability Champions.

Many of the actions in this initial Scheme relate directly to the concerns and ideas expressed during this event.

An internet based web survey was carried out to seek a response to general disability issues within the workforce. The web survey largely reinforced the priorities expressed in the community involvement events as well as raising a large number of individual issues related to general approach to promoting equality. The results of this survey were collated and circulated to Service reps working on Service Action Plans.

## **Councillor Involvement**

All Councillors were contacted post elections requesting those with a personal experience of disability or an ongoing interest in disability issues to contact the Development Group via the Project officer. Of the 68 councillors 5 expressed an interest in being directly involved in the development of the Scheme. These are currently being contacted individually to record their personal experiences and views on their work as Councillors and how support for disabled Councillors can be improved, how more disabled people can be involved in public life and the Council's wider response to the General Duty. This involvement will inform additions to strengthen the Scheme as it develops.

## **Volunteer Involvement**

A representative of one of the larger groups of volunteers attended the Turriff public involvement event and contributed to the body of information and views resulting from that event. The project officer carried out a follow up visit to the group and worked through the same worksheets in an environment and at a pace to suit those present.

Issues that were identified from this initial engagement were:

Promotion of Equality, Provision of equipment as needed, regular meetings with current/previous Volunteers, training for Employment Officers.

Eliminating harassment: Knowledge of how to report harassment. Dealing with harassment on public transport.

Promoting positive attitudes: Disabled volunteers should be visible doing important and useful tasks, awards and achievements should be publicised work in schools to improve attitudes.

Ways of ensuring fair treatment: Transport provision, better information about available provision eg Taxicards, supported housing, leisure activities/holidays.

## **Reviewing the Scheme**

Nineteen attendees of our involvement days requested the opportunity to comment on the Scheme as part of their further involvement. Review copies were sent to these and other reviewers.

Thirteen responses were obtained with the overall comment being overwhelmingly positive. One response was in the form of a letter, which was again very positive but structured differently from returns on questionnaires, which explains the total of 12 in the summary of returns below.

Boxes enabling respondents to add comments to each question and a more general comment at the end were provided and these comments will inform future changes to the plan where appropriate.

### **Questions asked as part of the review process were;**

Does the layout and structure of the scheme lend itself to being easy to use and understand?

Yes ---- 10

No ---- 2

Do you agree that the steps laid out in our Disability Equality Scheme will help us deliver equality of opportunity for disabled people in Aberdeenshire?

Yes ---- 12

No ----- 0

The Service Action Plans and tables in Appendix 1 describe the actions we currently think need to be taken in implementing our Disability Equality Scheme. Will these actions help us to deliver measurable progress in delivering equality of opportunity for disabled people?

Yes ---- 11

No -----0

(one respondent added their own “Maybe” response box to this question)

We believe the above represents an honest and transparent involvement of disabled people in a way that places them at the heart of the development of our scheme.