

# **Disability Equality Duty: Principles of good practice in involvement**

September 2007



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## **Introduction**

This short report has been prepared by RADAR for the Disability Rights Commission. It builds on previous work undertaken to identify good practice in involvement of disabled people and disability organisations in public bodies' preparation of Disability Equality Schemes.

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 placed a new requirement on the public sector to be proactive in promoting disability equality in its service provision and employment practices. This requirement came into force in December 2006.

As a result, public bodies developed Disability Equality Schemes, detailing action plans for improvement in the areas of:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination
- Promoting equal opportunities
- Eliminating disability related harassment
- Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- Encouraging participation by disabled persons in public life.

This report identifies good practice in involvement over a period of time encompassing initial involvement, development of Disability Equality Schemes, and implementation of action plans. In addition, Annex 1 lists examples of key achievements by public bodies since December 2006 which would not have been possible without the Disability Equality Duty.

This research has been undertaken in two stages. The first was a questionnaire seeking responses from disability organisations, disabled people and public bodies who thought they had produced or been involved with a particularly good process in terms of involvement and production of a Disability Equality Scheme. The

second was a series of in-depth interviews with respondents, both disability organisations and disabled people. The questionnaire received 55 positive responses, and there were 11 follow-up interviews. There were 10 responses from disability organisations and disabled people who had had a negative experience of involvement. The list of public bodies named during the research can be found in Annex 2 and the list of those who participated in the interviews in Annex 3.

These principles of good practice have been identified through respondents' involvement in the development of Disability Equality Schemes. However, the principles remain the same no matter what policy, process or action plan is being developed. It is therefore hoped that the simple detailing of the principles can be used by public bodies as a tool to enhance their engagement processes in all future involvement of disability organisations and disabled people.

## **Principles of Good Practice**

The research found a huge amount of agreement amongst respondents of what constitutes good practice. This demonstrates that disability organisations and disabled people know what they consider to be effective and mutually beneficial involvement. The lessons are there for public bodies to learn and, from experiences with the Disability Equality Duty, it is clear that what is needed is not complicated, but requires effective processes and a commitment to ongoing communication.

The findings of the research have been condensed into the following three lists that comprises the key principles of good practice.

### **Involvement process:**

- Ensure that all staff who are tasked with involving disability organisations and disabled people receive Disability Equality Training.
- Identify the broadest range of stakeholders, ensuring representation of different impairment types, ages, black and minority ethnic groups, gender, sexual orientation, religion and belief, areas of expertise, and geographical groups if appropriate. If this cannot be done internally, consider outsourcing this work to a local disability organisation on a contractual basis.
- Involve disability organisations and disabled people from the very beginning of a planning process, ensuring adequate time for planning and time frames for disability organisations to consult with their own members or stakeholders.
- Make sure that there is a clear understanding of what the public body wants to get out of the process, and expectations shared with those involved.
- Always communicate through a variety of mechanisms, including all materials available in accessible formats. This means making sure that everyone, including people with learning disabilities, mental health issues or autistic spectrum

disorders, can access the information and choose the method by which they can most effectively respond. A round table meeting can be exclusionary and should not be the only way in which involvement can take place.

- If the public body is holding a meeting, it is imperative that all needs are catered for, with all reasonable adjustments in place. Ask people well in advance so that provision can be made effectively. A budget should be put aside to cover any extra costs such as information in alternative formats, British Sign Language interpreters, palentypists, hearing loops, personal assistants. Always ask, rather than anticipate, what is needed to make a meeting accessible.
- Provision should be put in place to pay participants. It is important to recognise that by involving disability organisations and disabled people, expert advice is being sought, so there should be provision to pay for that advice as would be expected in any other setting.
- If there is no local organisation of disabled people with the resources or capacity to be involved, consider whether it is appropriate to fund such an organisation.

### **Development process:**

- Put in place mechanisms for regular and ongoing feedback, using a wide range of methods and ensuring all materials are accessible. All processes for feeding back should be transparent so that it is clear how people's input is being used.
- Recommendations from the involvement process should be used as part of the drafting of the document. A communication should be sent to all participants detailing exactly how those recommendations have been used and incorporated. If recommendations have not been used, this should be stated, along with the reasons why. This will ensure that everyone knows that their input has been received and understood, and will avoid accusations that the involvement process is tokenistic.

- Any steering group or committee that is involved in the ongoing review of the document should have representation of disabled people.
- In the document, and communications, there should be detailed, clear evidence for the decisions and policies that are being taken forward. All actions plans should be based on evidence of need, as this is the key to positive impact.
- All targets need to be achievable within the timeframe and measurable. There should be clear indicators that set out how it will be known when the target has been achieved, and assessment processes should be well publicised.

### **Implementation process:**

- There should be commitment and leadership from the top of the organisation. The Chief Executive and Executive Team must champion the changes and hold staff accountable for delivery.
- An implementation group or committee should be formed. This should comprise disability organisations and disabled people who were involved in the development process.
- Clear lines of responsibility and clear, and publicised, recourse processes are necessary to ensure that accountability is maintained and that disability organisations and disabled people can be a partner in implementation, even if they do not sit on an implementation group or committee.
- Action plans should receive high profile publicity. They should be available to all stakeholders and partners and progress should also be publicised. The action plan should be a public document, available to everyone who wants it.
- Feedback should continue through the implementation process, with all communication mechanisms utilised. There should, in addition, be regular requests for feedback from disability organisations and disabled people as to progress.
- There should be an annual review meeting with requests for all

stakeholders to feed into ongoing development. This process should also involve those who prefer to be involved through other communication routes, to ensure effective representation.

## **Conclusion**

The main tone of all participants in the research was that involvement is not a difficult process. As long as the public body is committed to involving disability organisations and disabled people from the beginning of the process, and listens to what is needed to ensure effective involvement, then it is not difficult to get it right. The key is not to assume what people need or want to become involved, but to ask and respond positively.

Those who responded to the questionnaire and took part in the interviews were overwhelmingly positive about the Disability Equality Duty and the impact that it has had on public bodies' awareness and action since December 2006. Annex 3 lists some of the achievements that were detailed during the research.

It is hoped that this short report will be a practical tool which public bodies can use to ensure that their involvement processes are positive experiences for all those participating.

# **Annex 1: Examples of achievements as a result of the Disability Equality Duty**

## **Board of Community Health Councils in Wales**

- Local Community Health Councils are using the Access Survey Checklist to review the accessibility of their premises
- All Community Health Councils in Wales have received an Accessible Venues Tool to audit external premises being used (or not) for the purposes of conducting their business
- Extra funding has been made available to provide communication support for members at meetings, to invest in specific communication support equipment and to cover respite/childcare costs to enable full engagement and participation of members

## **Darlington Borough Council**

- Substantial investment in access to Council buildings, currently 87.27 per cent accessibility, with a target for next year of 96 per cent
- Exemplary adjustments for all disabled staff and work on recruitment and retention of disabled people undertaken. A Positive Action Strategy on recruitment is being implemented
- Increase in information available in all formats
- Disability impact assessment for the mayoral referendum

## **Department for Education and Skills**

- Disabled people brought into the policy making and impact assessment process
- All staff offered training on disabled children and young people
- E-forum for disabled staff set up

- Higher Education Directorate carried out a planned research study about entry into higher education from non-traditional routes, including a programme of interviews with disabled students
- Learning and Skills Council national strategy Learning for Living and Work established the National Learners with Disability Panel
- New quality standards for Information, Advice and Guidance which specify the need to provide access to disabled young people, and positive action that should be taken

## **Gloucestershire County Council**

- Establishment of an internal disability network of staff
- Introduction of a work experience scheme for disabled people, with a commitment to 60 placements in 2007
- 10,000 staff have received Disability Awareness Training
- Mentoring programme linking disabled people with elected councillors

## **Kettering General Hospital**

- New accessible toilets
- Hearing loops on all reception desks
- Wheelchairs at all entrances for public use
- Advice on communication aids / methods to staff
- Good practice guidelines on disability equality produced and distributed to all staff

## **Lancashire Primary Care Trust**

- Development of an Access Audit Tool which cross-cuts equality strands

- Mandatory Equality and Diversity Development sessions to enable formulation of a equality and diversity action plan by each department
- Active involvement in community events involving disabled people
- Effective monitoring of disability throughout all Human Resources systems to inform action planning

## **London Development Agency**

- Gone from under 3 per cent to over 5 per cent disabled staff in 6 months
- Disability Equality Training courses offered to all staff
- Improved their performance against all 4 disability performance targets
- Disability Adviser appointed ot their Equality Monitoring and Review Group
- Disability targets increased in key projects such as the Olympics and employment
- Inclusive design toolkit produced
- Disabled Customer journey analysis for Business Link for London
- Work underway to support London Theatres welcome for disabled customers

## **Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service**

- Recruitment of new staff has included 3 Disability Advocates, 2 Deaf Advocates, 2 Older Persons Advocates and 3 Drug and Alcohol Advocates recognising the drug and alcohol addiction is often associated with mental health issues
- Smoke alarms for people with hearing and visual impairments

- Flame retardant bedding packs and throws for people with mobility impairments
- Key turners for people with mobility impairments
- 1300 home fire safety checks have been carried out by the Deaf Advocates, 2001 by the Disability Advocates, 3,452 by the Older Persons Advocates and 500 by the Drug and Alcohol Advocates

## **New Forest District Council**

- Article to raise awareness amongst small and medium sized businesses included in newsletter
- Pack of information on disability issues produced
- Information on raising awareness on alternative formats included at New Forest District Council stand at the New Forest Show and displayed at Council's own local offices
- Customised training held for planning and housing officers
- Local access group named as advisors for design statements for planning applications
- Leaflets on How to Vote produced for everyone, including people with learning disabilities

## **NHS Grampian**

- An initial batch of seventy induction loop systems has been purchased and installed in public clinical areas
- Leaflets and health care information is now presented in accessible font sizes and formats
- Access Audits have been commissioned to assess physical access to buildings
- Disability Awareness Training has been arranged for clinical, GP and ward staff

## **Nottingham City Council**

- Sickness policy rewritten
- Disability Equality Training to all staff
- Braille business cards introduced and issued to all staff
- A single process for workplace reasonable adjustments introduced

## **Powys County Council**

- All services are now required to involve disabled people in their annual business planning process
- All services now have an equality impact assessment
- Services have conducted a training needs analysis for disability equality and have started the training process

## **Stockport Borough Council**

- 15 Council employees trained in British Sign Language and another 15 in the pipeline
- The establishment of a new mental health Crisis House, the recruitment of 50 mental health volunteers and the employment of 5 new Support, Time and Recovery workers
- The publication of a Disability Friendly Taxi Directory listing companies trained in disability customer care
- All Developing Control and Building Control Officers have received bespoke training on access issues
- All building applications are now accompanied by a Design and Access Statement, otherwise the application is rejected

## **Sussex Police**

- Senior officers and staff received Disability Equality Training

prior to their involvement in the development of the Scheme

- Sussex Police has signed a 3 year contract with 'Hidden Differences' to help make its website compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act
- The Sussex Police website contains British Sign Language video clips
- In recognition that mobile phone texting is a preferred method of contact for deaf people, and to supplement the existing 'non-emergency' text service, the force is introducing an emergency text service
- Human Resources Managers across the force have received specific Disability Discrimination Act training
- Sussex Police have purchased a Service People with Disabilities information booklet for all existing officers and staff, with sufficient stocks to give to all new entrants for the next two years
- Sussex Police is enabling the establishment of a new network for disabled officers and other staff

## **University of Manchester**

- Extent of disclosure of disability from staff has risen, meaning the number of disabled staff has risen from 3 per cent to 11 per cent
- Proposal for a ring-fenced budget to support disabled staff
- Progression of disabled staff is being routinely monitored from 2007
- All University policies and guidelines are being reviewed to incorporate disability impact assessment

## **Vale of Glamorgan Council**

- Revision of the Council's recruitment and selection policy

- Programme of Disability Equality Training and British Sign Language training is in place
- Production of an 'accessible venues' checklist and 'accessible documents' guidelines

## **West Yorkshire Police**

- Creation of a Disability Action Group chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable
- Barriers to employment working group are exploring recruitment issues for disabled people
- Accessibility improvements to website
- Introduction of an internal disability support network

## **Annex 2: Public bodies named in questionnaire responses**

This list includes both positive and negative responses. Not all responses named a specific public body. Three public bodies were named by more than one questionnaire response.

- Blaenau Gwent Council
- Board of Community Health Councils in Wales
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Cheshire County Council
- Commission for Social Care Inspection
- Darlington Borough Council
- Department for Education and Skills
- East Dunbartonshire Council
- Epsom & St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust
- Essex Police
- Fareham Borough Council
- Gateshead Council
- Gloucestershire Constabulary
- Gloucestershire County Council
- Greater Manchester Transport Passenger Executive
- Herefordshire Primary Care Trust
- Housing Corporation
- Islington Council

- Kent Fire Service
- Kettering General Hospital
- Lancashire Primary Care Trust
- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
- London Development Agency
- Manchester Hospital Health Trusts
- Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service
- NHS Grampian
- New Forest District Council
- Northumbria Police
- Nottingham City Council
- Park Lane College Keighley
- Pontypridd and Rhondda NHS Trust
- Powys County Council
- Shropshire County Council
- Southend Council
- Staffordshire County Council
- Stockport Borough Council
- Sussex Police
- Transport Scotland
- University of Manchester
- Vale of Glamorgan Council

- Velindre NHS Trust
- West Berkshire Council
- West Lothian Council
- West Midlands Fire Service
- West Yorkshire Police
- Wrexham County Borough Council

## **Annex 3: Interviewees**

- Minty and Friend, about London Development Agency
- Aberdeen Action on Disability, about NHS Grampian
- Disability Action in Islington, about Islington Council
- Disability North, about Northumbria Police
- Vin West, about the Board of Community Health Councils in Wales
- Darlington Association on Disability, about Darlington Borough Council
- CIKL, about Kent Fire Service
- David Price, about Herefordshire Primary Care Trust
- Fareham Access Group, about Fareham Borough Council
- West Berkshire Disability Alliance, about West Berkshire Council
- Disability Stockport, about Stockport Council