



Putting People First Addendum

Making Disability Equality a Reality

Hertfordshire's Disability Equality Scheme

December 2006 – December 2009

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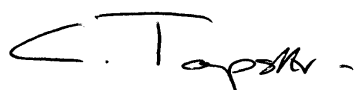
Hertfordshire County Council has a clear commitment to achieving equality of opportunity as set out in Putting People First our integrated equalities strategy.

The Disability Discrimination Act places a general duty on the County Council to promote disability equality when carrying out its functions. The Act also introduces specific duties and one of these is to publish a Disability Equality Action Plan that sets out how we plan to achieve disability equality.

Hertfordshire County Council already has a good record in promoting equality to build on. The Council has an integrated equality strategy (Putting People First), equality and diversity trained staff and equality action plans for each of our services. Additionally the Council has been assessed at level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, which requires us to demonstrate how we are considering equalities issues as part of our everyday work.

A report on the progress of the Disability Equality Action Plan will be completed once a year and a review of the entire scheme will take place every 3 years.

Our aim in producing this Action Plan is to demonstrate our wholehearted commitment to continued action in tackling inequality. We strive to incorporate diversity and equalities into everything that we do, so it is an integral part of our business and not an 'add-on'.



Caroline Tapster

Chief Executive

Introduction

This is the first Disability Equality scheme to be produced by Hertfordshire County Council. The scheme is part of an overarching equalities strategy (Putting People First) which sets out the vision which the council has to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equal opportunities for all people. Some people may experience exclusion for reasons relating to their race, ethnicity, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation or religion. This scheme sets out what we intend to do to improve fair and equal access to employment and Council services for people with disabilities.

Disability

“Based on research, around one in five people of working age are considered by the Government and by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) to be “disabled”.

What that means is that they have a disability or a long-term health condition that has an impact on their day to day lives. People in these circumstances are likely to have rights under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

There are 2 main models of disability: the medical model and the social model. The medical model sees disability as an illness, with disabled patients needing a cure to fit into ‘normal’ society. The Social model of disability recognizes that disabled people are equals who are battling against unequal odds. What disables people is not their particular condition but the way society reacts to it.

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) was introduced in order to improve opportunities for disabled people. It is unlawful to discriminate against a person because they experience disability. Organisations must also make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to ensure that the person can access services and employment.

Although the law has been in place for 10 years there are still many barriers which prevent disabled people from fair and equal access. The Government has set out a vision for disability equality:

“By 2025, disabled people in Britain should have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life and will be respected and included as equal members of society”

Public bodies have a significant impact on the lives of all citizens and the law has been amended to place greater responsibilities on them to achieve this vision. Therefore as from 5 December 2005 all public bodies, when carrying out their functions, need to:

- Promote equality of opportunity
- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful
- Eliminate harassment of disabled people that relates to their disability
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- Encourage participation by disabled persons in public life

- Take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably.

There is also a specific requirement to publish a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) which sets out the action that will be taken to meet these requirements.

The Hertfordshire Context

Hertfordshire is a diverse county within the prosperous south of England. It covers an area of 634 sq miles and has an estimated population of just over 1 million.

The number of disabled people in Hertfordshire can be estimated using information gathered from the 2001 census. In this census 18.9% of households in Hertfordshire contained at least one person with a limiting lifelong illness, health problem or disability, which limits their daily activities or the work they can do. 115,728 people described themselves as having long-term limiting illness.

However some people are unlikely to have identified themselves within these categories, for example Deaf people who use British Sign Language. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People believes that 1 in 7 of the population have some form of hearing loss.

Hertfordshire County Council's Commitment to Disability Equality

The purpose of Hertfordshire County Council's Disability Equality Scheme is to explain in one document how HCC will make sure that it promotes equality for disabled and deaf people and challenges discrimination against them.

The aim of the equality scheme is to 'mainstream' disability equality by ensuring that all services consider the impact that their policies and procedures have on access to services and employment.

In order to reflect the size and complexity of the organisation and ensure that the County Council builds as far as possible on existing procedures this authority wide overarching Disability Equality Action Plan has been developed. This will be supplemented by service based action plans wherever necessary. These will be based on the commitments and targets in the overarching scheme.

Departments produce specific Equality Action Plans which detail the specific areas they will focus on and the targets for equality issues for the forthcoming year.

The County Council has an agreed commitment in relation to achieving equality and the underlying principles in relation to this commitment are enshrined within Putting People First as follows:-

- To provide services that are equally accessible to all people, free from prejudice and unfair discrimination and sensitive to the needs of all the community
- Value people and their differences and enable all our employees to achieve their full potential, creating vitality within our organisation and the services we deliver
- Seek to influence the work and contribution of partner organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors by ensuring equality issues and considerations are taken into account when developing major strategies
- Work actively towards eliminating all forms of unfair discrimination, both direct and indirect
- Target resources to groups and communities who are most excluded
- Encourage partnership and participation in the development and application of Council policy and practices

Hertfordshire County Council's Structure and Processes

Member Processes

The County Council comprises of 77 councillors who are elected every 4 years. The Council appoints a cabinet each year, which includes the Leader and 9 other councillors. Cabinet has day to day responsibility for all County Council decisions in line with the overall policies and budget. Reports on the progress of the Disability Equality Action Plan will be presented to members through the Cabinet Resources Panel, who will have responsibility for monitoring progress. An annual review of progress is reported to this committee and also published on the Councils website – www.hertsdirect.org

Departmental Processes

The Council has a responsibility to deliver Best Value and there are regular reviews which examine the way services are experienced by the service user. Every review will consider the equality aspects of the service and assess whether there is a negative impact for any minority groups, including disabled service users.

Departments are keen to mainstream the process of impact assessment into their day to day activity, and in most cases this now forms an integral part of their existing service planning frameworks.

Hertfordshire's Structure

Hertfordshire County Council is responsible for the delivery of a wide range of services throughout the County. These include:

- Services to Children, Schools and Families
- Adult Care Services
- Environment
- Fire and Rescue

- Corporate Services

The Chief Executive oversees the work of each service through the Strategic Management Board, and each Chief Officer is responsible for implementing Disability Equality in their service. The Corporate Director is the lead officer for equalities in employment. The lead officer for equalities in service delivery is the Head of Performance Improvement.

We have a number of dedicated equalities officers working both at departmental and corporate levels, and each service has an officer with lead responsibility for equalities who takes this work forward.

The County Council has an Equality Strategy Group comprising of senior officers from each service with a lead for equalities. This group will be the implementation group for the Disability Equality Action Plan. The group will provide regular reports to Strategic Management Board and Departmental Boards on its progress.

Involving Disabled People

It is an essential requirement that the Disability Equality Scheme is developed with the participation of disabled people. A document which is developed without the input of the key stakeholders will not succeed and public bodies therefore need to develop mechanisms to ensure that there is accessible participation and involvement on the Duty. We already have good communication links with disability community and voluntary groups, and the development of this scheme helped us to build on these relationships by focussing on identifying the real barriers to disability equality. Our involvement process had 3 stages:

Stage 1 – Listening to Disabled People

We developed a questionnaire to help us structure the priorities within the scheme. Before sending this out more widely this questionnaire was piloted with a group from Hertfordshire Action on Disability as well as Watford Disability Forum. The questionnaire was then amended in line with the feedback received from these 2 groups. We then sent out this questionnaire to a range of disabled groups in Hertfordshire that incorporated a variety of needs. The groups included learning disability groups, mental health groups, physical disability groups and sensory service groups.

HCC recognises that discrimination and disadvantage are compounded for many disabled people because they are female, are older, from a black or minority ethnic community or are gay and lesbian. For this reason we sent the questionnaire to several additional groups such as carer groups, BME groups and advocacy organisations. The full list of the groups involved is listed in the appendices.

The questionnaire was used to help us to:

- Identify barriers to accessing employment and services faced by disabled people
- Help set the priorities for our Action Plan
- Assist with identifying activity to address the disability agenda.

Approximately 1600 Questionnaires were sent out to individuals, organisations and community groups working with people with disabilities.

We received 178 questionnaires back, which represents a reasonable response rate of 11%.

The questionnaire asked individuals to identify whether they had a disability themselves, whether they were a carer for someone with a disability or worked with disabled individuals or whether they represented a disabled persons organisation.

The questionnaire then went on to ascertain what County Council services the person used, and if in their experience they have found information on the Council, its services and its buildings easy to access.

The questionnaire then focused on what the Council did well, what we did less well and asked for examples to illustrate their views. Individuals were also asked to list the 3 improvements that would make the biggest difference to them.

The questionnaire also asked for monitoring information such as type of disability, gender, age and ethnic group.

Our experience had told us that some groups may have been unable or unwilling to complete the questionnaires, but this did not mean that they did not have a valuable contribution to make. These groups were therefore offered an individual session to discuss any issues.

The deadline for information from the questionnaires was November 3rd.

Employee Involvement

In addition to the public involvement, we have involved employees. The questionnaire was circulated to DECOG, the Council's Disabled Employees Coordinating Group as well as being sent to all employees who had told us they had a disability. This resulted in a further 400 questionnaires being sent out. Of these 400 questionnaires 47 were returned which represents a response rate of 12%.

Stage 2 – Participation and Involvement Event – Planning Delivery

As the second stage of the process, a participation and involvement event was held on 22 November for people who completed the questionnaires. This event was attended by over 50 people including representatives from local disability groups and employees. During the event attendees were asked for their views regarding the following:

- The process used to collect information for Hertfordshire's Disability Equality Scheme
- The first draft of Hertfordshire's Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan
- How they would like to be involved in reviewing and/or monitoring the scheme over the next 3 years

In addition attendees were asked if they had any other comments/experiences they wished to share either in receiving services from HCC or as an employee of HCC

In order to collect this feedback 5 smaller discussion groups were facilitated. Feedback received focused on the following areas:

- Disability awareness training for staff
- Communication methods
- Access to buildings
- Commitment to fund actions identified
- Making the Hertsdirect website accessible
- Commissioning and monitoring of contractors

Hertfordshire's Disability Equality Scheme will be reviewed in light of the feedback received and appropriate amendments made to both priorities and actions.

Stage 3 – Continuing Involvement

We want to continue to engage the groups already involved over the next 3 years as well as engage additional groups, particularly those groups that were under represented as part of stages 1 & 2.

Impact Assessments

As part of the DES and good general practice Hertfordshire County Council is required to impact assess its services, policies & functions in relation to disability.

The purpose of Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is to ensure that we do not disadvantage disabled people (either employees or service users), in any way and also identify where we might better promote equality of opportunity.

If adverse impact is identified, the process should pay due regard to the need to modify the service or policy.

HCC has developed a tool for Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) which covers the areas of:

- Disability
- Race/Ethnicity
- Gender
- Age

- Sexual Orientation
- Religion/Belief

The EIA has 3 stages:

1. Outline Assessment
2. Full Assessment
3. Improvement Plan

HCC has produced a list of services, policies and functions across the whole organisation that needs to be impact assessed

A three level priority scheme is used to assess the relevance of each functions policy:-

High Priority – will be any functions/policies for which there is a substantial evidence that disabled people are (or could be) differently affected, or where there is public concern

Medium Priority – will be any functions/policies where there is little or some evidence that disabled people are (or could be) differently affected, or where there is public concern

Low Priority – will be other functions/policies

Any functions/policies identified as high priority will be reviewed to identify issues such as: take up levels of disabled people, levels of complaint, satisfaction levels etc. We have developed separate guidance on how to undertake an impact assessment and identify any unmet need, and we encourage this work to be built into existing processes, such as service planning, our work around Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and our continued progress against the Equality Standard.

Information Gathering

The Disability Equality Duty requires all public authorities to have robust processes for gathering information in relation to disability. This section sets out the responsibilities of HCC in relation to information gathering.

Recruitment, Development and Retention of Disabled Employees

HCC currently has processes in place that collect a variety of demographic data from:

- Applicants
- Employees
- Leavers

This information is published annually in the Workforce Profile Report and placed on both HertsDirect (internet) and Connect (intranet).

The Council are committed to taking action where disproportionate data is identified in the following areas:

- Rates of job applications, selection success and success at different stages of shortlisting
- Rates of training applications and nominations
- Harassment, grievances and discrimination complaints
- Disciplinary proceedings and decisions made
- Leaving mechanisms and underlying reasons for leaving

We do not currently have data on all our employees in relation to disability, but the latest data at December 2006 (for 59.8% of the workforce) shows that 3.72% of our employees have a disability as defined by the DDA. We are developing a positive action programme to cover all areas of equalities, and will identify areas of under-representation, and take action to redress imbalances.

Delivering the Disability Equality Scheme

This document is only the beginning of the work to deliver the duty. The core of work is:

- Taking the actions forward
- Improving the performance of the authority through the outcomes of impact assessments
- Building up the information base about performance on disability equality
- Improving the employment prospects and the employment experience of disabled people
- Making sure there is continuing involvement and participation of disabled people in the services we provide and in the way we deliver them

Reviewing the Disability Equality Scheme

The Disability Equality Scheme will be reviewed on an annual basis. The Equality Strategy Group will present an annual report to the Resources Cabinet Panel to detail progress on the actions. A new Action Plan will be produced in December 2009.

Contacts

If you have any queries, or comments about this Scheme, please contact:

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DISABILITY EQUALITY ACTION PLAN

1. Leadership and Corporate Commitment

Ensuring that disability equality is mainstreamed into all aspects of the council's work

	Objective	Actions	Measures	Timescale	Responsibility/resources
1.1	Promote Equality of Opportunity and raise the standard of Disability Equality across the council	<p>Progress against the Duty reviewed and reported annually</p> <p>Full Review of the Disability Equality Scheme every 3 years involving disabled people</p>	<p>Update report produced and published</p> <p>Full review report produced</p> <p>Involvement of disability groups, employees, service users</p>	<p>Annually each December</p> <p>December 2009</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>SMB</p> <p>Departmental Boards</p> <p>Equalities Steering Group (ESG)</p>
1.2	<p>To assess the likely impact (on Disability Equality) of existing and proposed policies and to eliminate any discrimination identified</p> <p>Prioritised Plan for Impact Assessment of functions, policies and procedures</p>	<p>Departments undertake disability equality Impact and Needs Assessments on all policies and procedures</p>	<p>A prioritised programme of services, functions and policies to be assessed</p> <p>Completed impact and needs assessments with actions incorporated into Service equality Action Plans</p> <p>Published Impact Assessments</p>	<p>From December 2006</p> <p>By December 2009</p>	<p>SMB</p> <p>Heads of service</p> <p>ESG</p> <p>Service Managers</p>
1.3	To develop corporate guidance on accessible information and signage	<p>Guidance produced</p>	<p>Guidance available/promoted on website</p> <p>Staff with improved understanding of information and communication needs</p>		<p>Corporate Communications</p> <p>ESG</p>

			of all disabled people		
1.4	To raise awareness of Disability Equality corporately	Development of diversity training programme for all staff which includes disability awareness Use of disabled organisation in devising and delivering training	Delivery of training	2007	Human Resources
1.5	Benchmark HCC against other organisations in the field of Disability Equality	Ongoing comparison and sharing of good practice Attending EERA Diversity Networks	Benchmarking briefings to ESG	Ongoing	ESG Equalities Manager

2. Service Delivery and Customer Care

To determine how policies, functions and procedures affect disabled people in service delivery and customer care and whether they are having adverse effects on some groups or individuals.

	Objective	Action	Measure	Timescale	Responsibility/Resources
2.1	To identify service needs of people with disabilities and barriers to accessing services	Filter results of DED questionnaire and feedback from work within Districts to service departments Further/ongoing needs to be identified through equality impact assessments with assistance from disabled employee and community groups	Creation of new commitments based on results of questionnaires/ links to existing policies. Equality impact assessments carried out Service equality Action Plans	From December 2006 By December 2009 Ongoing	Heads of Service ESG Service Managers
2.2	To provide information in accessible formats	Ensure that all staff who have contact with the public are aware of procedures to accommodate people with language difficulties, hearing and visual impairment, mental ability and accessibility needs	Staff training and guidance available, plus information on the Council's intranet	Ongoing	ESG Human Resources
2.3	To ensure all buildings from which the Council provides services are accessible to people with disabilities To ensure Council employment bases are accessible	Audits to be undertaken of all premises from which the Council provides services to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities Involvement of disability groups during planning stages for all new HCC buildings	Action plans detailing appropriate works to be carried together with timescales for completion DECOG consulted 1:1's carried out with every relocated staff member	Ongoing	Property Human Resources
2.4	Services are delivered that provide independence and choice for people to control their own lives	Develop services that provide independence and choice	Positive customer feedback	Ongoing	Departmental Boards

3. Employment and Training

To determine how policies, functions and procedures affect disabled people in employment and training and whether they are having adverse effects on some groups or individuals.

	Objective	Actions	Measures		
3.1	To become more reflective of the community and increase the number of disabled people working for HCC	<p>Annual Reporting in Workforce Profile Report</p> <p>Conduct data Validation exercise for disability</p> <p>Review Exit Procedures to ensure that we can identify any adverse impact on people with disabilities</p>	<p>Improvement in BV016a (percentage of disabled people in employment:) Current: 3.72% Targets: 3.9 % – 06/07 4% - 07/08 4.10% - 08/09</p>	Ongoing	Human Resources
3.2	Improve Recruitment policies and procedures	<p>Impact Assessment of Recruitment and Selection process</p> <p>Meeting criteria of ‘two ticks’ disability standard for employing people with disabilities</p> <p>Clarity in the application process, about support available for people with disabilities. E.g. transport, access to work, communication etc.</p> <p>Alternative formats of recruitment packs available</p> <p>Incorporate Disability Equality into recruitment and selection training</p> <p>Ensure jobs Website is fully accessible</p>	<p>More applications from disabled people</p> <p>All interviewers understand and are competent in the disability issues and all other equality and diversity streams</p> <p>Staff know about the Access to Work scheme</p> <p>Interviews are carried out to meet the needs of people with disabilities i.e. timings, venue, equipment etc.</p>	Ongoing	Human Resources
		Using appropriate methods of advertising and recruiting to posts that encourages and supports people with disabilities.	Large print and easy read options available.		

		<p>Building good relationships with local press and advertising posts.</p> <p>Use local disability organisations to help advertise posts.</p>	IT support information is offered when someone is unable to fill in the online application form.		
3.3	HCC is able to offer flexible working options	Flexible Working options are available and promoted to staff with disabilities	<p>Increased number of flexible working requests from disabled employees</p> <p>Increased number of flexible working requests granted for employees with disabilities</p>	Ongoing	Human Resources
3.4	To eliminate any possible discrimination in the workplace	<p>Monitor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Training applications ➤ H&B complaints ➤ Grievances ➤ Disciplinary proceedings and decisions ➤ Exit interviews 	Published results in annual Workforce Profile Report	2007 onwards	Human resources
3.5	To deal with harassment, grievances and complaints appropriately	<p>Publicity of harassment and bullying policy and grievance policy</p> <p>Information on reporting incidents and any breaches of equal opportunities</p> <p>Ensure those investigating complaints are competent in disability issues</p> <p>Ensure Volunteer Supporters are trained in Disability Equality</p>	Improved awareness	2007	Human Resources
3.6	Staff induction training covers disability awareness	Review current induction process	More awareness of disability issues, including communication	2007	Human Resources
3.7	Incorporate the elements of the Disability equality Scheme into current training	Ensure Trainers (internal and external) incorporate equality issues into their training programmes	Training reflects the requirements of the Disability equality Scheme	Ongoing	Human Resources

	programmes		as appropriate		
3.8	Standard tool for effective Impact Assessments	Publish standard EIA tool on Connect	Standardised EIA undertaken	Ongoing	Human Resources
3.9	Establish Training programme for undertaking Impact Assessments	Commission and run organisation Impact Assessment training	Staff competent in undertaking Impact Assessments	2007	Human Resources
3.10	Improve attendance at DECOG and the Disabled Employees Forum	Review current group operation Develop ways to encourage feedback from disabled staff	Increase numbers attending	Ongoing	Human Resources

4. Information and Communication

To ensure that disable people are involved in the development of inclusive information and communication.

	Objective	Actions	Measure	Timescale	Responsibility/Resources
4.1	Develop accessible communication channels/methods	Routine use of appropriate communication channels including: Plain English, BSL, picture language, audio/spoken word formats, Braille, talking newspapers Improvement of website facilities	Increased satisfaction with communication accessibility More training provided on using appropriate media for communications Better awareness of communication needs of various disabled groups	Dec 2009	Human Resources Corporate Communications ICT Heads of service
4.2	Ensure disabled people are involved in the planning and assessment of policies and practices	Include involvement of disabled groups as a key strand of the 'Have your say' principles for involvement and participation More involvement of disabled groups (including in impact assessments – see action 2.1)	Better understanding of the requirements for consulting with people with disabilities Ongoing involvement of disability groups	January 2007 Ongoing	Equalities Officers
4.3	Actively promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and help eliminate harassment through positive representation	People represented as integrated members of the community in reports, websites and other channels of communication Profiling of disabled role models	More representation	Ongoing	Departmental Boards
4.4	The views of disable people are monitored, understood and acted upon	Complaint reporting forms to include	Clear picture of complaints by disability	Ongoing	Equalities Officers

		<p>whether the individual has a disability</p> <p>Ensure work is undertaken to improve barriers identified by complaints</p>	Improvements made		<p>Human Resources</p> <p>Departmental Boards</p>
4.5	People receive information that reflects their personal needs	<p>Regular review of communication guidance</p> <p>Monitor take up on alternative formats</p> <p>Improve communications information on Connect in relation to BSL and interpreters</p>	Positive Customer Feedback	Ongoing	<p>Departmental Boards</p> <p>Corporate Communications</p>