

Disability Equality Scheme

December 2006



Introduction

Cambridgeshire County Council's Disability Equality Scheme (DES) is one of a number of measures taken by the Council to meet our commitment to promote equality of opportunity for the citizens of Cambridgeshire.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 places a statutory duty on public authorities to promote 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" *Improving Life Chances of Disabled People – Strategy Unit, 2005.*

Definition of disability – a physical, sensory, cognitive or mental impairment which has substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities including HIV, some cancers and neurological illnesses from the point of diagnosis.

This Disability Equality Scheme sets out how we will:

- Eliminate unlawful disability discrimination
- Eliminate disability related harassment
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encourage participation of disabled people in public life

The Disability Scheme needs to be read alongside the Council's Equality Policy and the Race Equality Scheme.

The work of Cambridgeshire County Council is divided between the following three Offices and the Chief Executive's Department:

- Office of Children and Young People
- Office of Environment and Community Services
- Office of Corporate Services

Each Office appoints representatives to attend both the Corporate Diversity Group (Strategic) and the Corporate Diversity Group (Operational). Employee groups including the Disability In Action - Disabled Employees & Members group

(DIADEM) and the Trade Unions also appoint representatives to attend the Strategic group. Together the Strategic and Operational groups oversee the Council's duties to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity

Population

Research data is helpful in mapping the number and spread of disabled people across Cambridgeshire but the population of disabled people is highly diverse. It includes people from all age groups and backgrounds across the income and education spectrum.

Cambridgeshire is predominately a rural county bringing with it specific implications of access for disabled people. It is vital that service developments, health, employment and training programmes for disabled people recognise and address some of the additional issues that are caused by the rural nature of the county and the specific needs of different groups of disabled people.

Council Functions and Policies

It is a fundamental principle of the Council's policies that all people should be valued with regard to their economic circumstances, gender, age, disabilities, culture, ethnicity, language (including British Sign Language), religion and belief or sexual orientation.

As the provider and commissioner of key public services – Education, Social Services, Environment and Community Services - the Council has an impact on the lives of all people who live, work and travel in Cambridgeshire. The County Council recognises the need to work in partnership with others to build societies based on self-respect, and respect for others, the neighbourhood and authority. Disabled people want the same life opportunities as other members of society but they face significant barriers within society including discrimination, negative attitudes and unequal access to services. The Council is committed to working in partnership with disabled people and their carers, the District Councils, Health and Housing providers and the voluntary and independent sector to break down

barriers, deliver improved services and enable disabled people to realise their potential and enjoy a good quality of life.

The Council is aware that people are disabled by systems, structures and attitudes that prevent them from accessing mainstream activities and doing the things that other people take for granted. The scheme sets out the strategic direction for services for disabled people to deliver independence, choice, control and inclusion.

The Equality Standard for Local Government

In 2001 the government introduced a generic Equalities Standard for Local Government. The Equality Standard provides us with a systematic framework to ensure that public authorities consider race, age, gender and disability at all levels of policy and practice. The Equality Standard is made up of five levels:

1. Commitment to a comprehensive equality policy
2. Assessment and consultation
3. Setting quality objectives and targets
4. Information systems and monitoring against targets
5. Achieving and reviewing outcomes

Initial assessment against the standard indicated that Cambridgeshire was working towards level 1 which we achieved in March 2004. To attain level 2 the authority had to show evidence of carrying out a number of Equality Impact Assessments (EIA); be actively engaged in consultation with minority groups and be developing information systems that provide effective monitoring information and make it possible for us to carry out accurate self-assessment of our responsibility to promote equality. The Council claimed achievement of level 2 of the standard in March 2006.

The process of developing the DES (Disability Equality Scheme) includes ensuring we take the needs and views of disabled people into account when we design and deliver services, make access improvements and develop policies.

Participation

To develop this scheme Cambridgeshire County Council worked with disabled people and their representatives from the Disability In Action - Disabled Employees & Members group (DIADDEM),

the Physical and Sensory Impairment Partnership Board and the Learning Disability Partnership Board. These groups include disabled people and representatives from voluntary organisations across the county.

The County also held three focus group meetings with disabled people – two with people with physical and sensory impairments and one with people who are learning disabled. To avoid over consultation the County worked in partnership with the City and District Councils and other local public service providers to share findings from focus group meetings and other service provider consultations with disabled people.

Assessment and Monitoring

The Council will actively seek to promote equality through policy development. As part of the Council's service planning process a programme of Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) is being developed to ensure that over time all services, functions and policies are reviewed.

The Equality Impact Assessments identify areas of negative impact on race, gender, disability and also age, sexuality and belief. All County Councillors and employees have a role to play in monitoring policies, procedures and services to ensure that they are not affecting some groups or communities negatively. Monitoring the Equality Action Plans will form a significant part of the Corporate Diversity Group's role.

Services require information on the customer base of their services and to compare this with the local population profile. If it appears that a service has a negative impact on certain minority groups, or that some communities are unable to access services or are over or under represented, it will be the Service's responsibility to engage with the community to find out whether it is necessary to take action to redress the balance and if so, how best to do so.

Training and support will be available to Services requiring advice on how to ensure that accurate assessments are made and to develop effective action plans.

Consultation and Communication



The Council consults employees and the public in a number of ways, including meetings, publications, road shows, by post, via the internet. Council documents are available to the public and many meetings are open to the public.

The Council is committed to engaging minority groups in consultation on priorities, objectives and service delivery and seeks to improve services based on the views of disabled people. The Council is proactive in seeking the views of all communities and strives to improve services within the bounds of legislation and resources.

By working with disabled people the Council seeks to:

- Improve service delivery and employment
- Change the culture and attitudes towards disabled people
- Remove barriers to participation in society

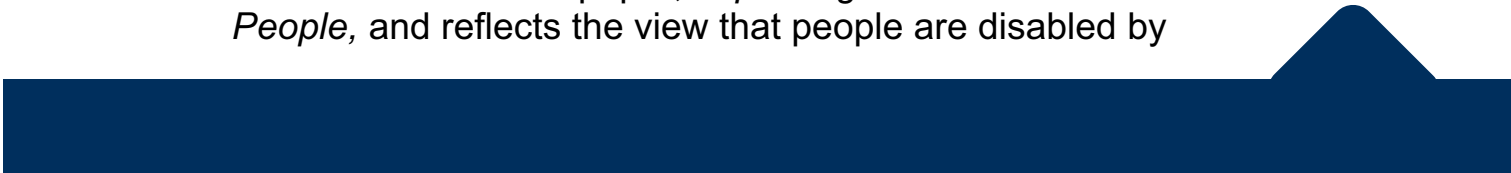
The Council works closely with other authorities to ensure that consultation is coordinated, more effective and does not become too onerous for minority groups.

The Council publishes the results of assessments, consultations and monitoring on its internet site. Upon request, Council reports and publications are available to the public in a range of formats and languages.

There are many ways of distributing information about the Council and its services. A summary of the Best Value Performance Plan Priorities is distributed to every household, as is an A-Z of Council Services containing contact details for every service including those provided by the District and City Councils. The Council also consults the public annually on its budget priorities and, in addition, its internet site has been improved to make more information directly accessible to the public, to make it more user-friendly and to comply with recognised access standards for visually impaired people.

A Positive Approach to Disability

The Council takes a positive approach to improving life chances for disabled people. Our approach is based on the key themes of the Government's paper, *Improving Life Chances of Disabled People*, and reflects the view that people are disabled by



systems, structures and attitudes which prevent them from accessing mainstream activities and doing the things that non-disabled people take for granted.

The Council acknowledges that individuals have personal needs arising from their illness or impairment that require high quality health or social care.

This approach underpins the intention of the Council to develop person-centred services that are responsive to individual needs and promote independence, choice, control and inclusion in society. This means:

- Enabling people to live full and active lives in their own communities with access to training and employment and social opportunities including access to a range of ordinary facilities;
- Supporting people to remain in their own homes and minimising the use of institutional care (residential, day care or hospital setting);
- Ensuring people have maximum control over their lives and choices about the way in which services are provided by using person-centred plans and direct payments;
- Breaking down the barriers of discrimination, negative attitudes and unequal access.

Buildings Access

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995-2005 places a duty on the County Council to ensure that the physical features of the built environment are not barriers to public services, education or employment. Best Value Performance Indicator 156 requires the County Council to report annually the percentage of their buildings, to which the public are invited, that are physically accessible. Informed by this, and in preparation for the implementation in October 2004 of S. 21 of the DDA, substantial programmes of adaptations have been undertaken and over 80% of public buildings are physically accessible. Also, services will be reasonably adjusted or provided by reasonable alternative means to ensure inclusive use. The public buildings that are not fully compliant are scheduled for either renovation or re-development. The opportunity will then be taken to address any non-compliance.

Largely triggered by pupils with special educational needs, schools are being adapted to meet needs, arising from disability, of pupils, employees and the community. This ensures the choice of inclusive mainstream education for a greater number of families. The implementation of LEAs statutory Access Strategy and Schools' Access Plans are ensuring on-going accessibility improvement.

From the initial feasibility stages, the Design Project Management process monitors the accessibility of all construction projects for new buildings and building alteration. Statutory Design and Access statements accompany all planning applications.

The County Council leases buildings. An access audit is undertaken as part of a condition survey and it would inform questions of fitness for purpose and value. Occasionally, urgency dictates that a non-compliant building is occupied. The Estates Section provides service management with a document outlining the risks involved and the responses that need to be made. This document indicates that prior to occupation it would be appropriate for an Equality Impact Assessment to be undertaken.

Employment

Cambridgeshire County Council is keen to retain the skills and experience of employees who acquire a disability and works with them to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made or redeployment opportunities are offered wherever possible.

As a two-tick symbol employer and an organisation positive about the benefits that a diverse workforce can bring it, the Council supports disabled people seeking employment. We guarantee to interview any candidate with a disability who meets the essential criteria of the post and prior to interview we ask all candidates to let us know if they have any special requirements to enable their attendance at the interview. If a candidate with a disability is not offered an interview the recruiting manager is required to complete a form explaining reasons.

In September 2003 the Chief Executive signed partnership agreements with Remploy and the Papworth Trust. These agreements heralded a new partnership approach to providing

opportunities for employment in the Council, one of the largest employers in Cambridgeshire.

Under the partnership agreements the Council will keep both organisations informed of current vacancies and Remploy and the Papworth Trust will offer advice and support to disabled applicants. Remploy and the Papworth Trust will also be the first point of contact for smaller organisations representing disabled people wishing to work with the Council over placements so that they are not excluded. The Council has already successfully placed disabled people in work experience and some have later gone on to gain fixed term and permanent positions. The Council now wants to build on this to offer opportunities to a wide range of people.

An important part of the Agreements will be the opportunity for disabled people to gain work placements in the Council to find out what it would be like to work there and give them valuable experience, particularly if they have been out of the work place for a while.

Training

Awareness of equality and diversity issues is a fundamental element of the Council's Corporate Induction programme for all new employees; it forms an important part of Recruitment and Selection training, a requirement for all recruiting managers is that they must attend this training and refresh their knowledge every three years.

Our Management Development courses and the Diploma in Management have Diversity and Ethical Management modules, which are delivered to both County Council employees and partners in the health service and district councils.

As part of the preparation for the implementation in October 2004 of Section 21 of the DDA, a programme of training was devised. The two main modules were (i) a seven-part introduction to inclusive design for architects and surveyors and (ii) service specific training to inform service design and delivery, especially at times of service development and review.

However, it was agreed that prior to attendance at (i) or (ii) above, there should be a course to introduce disability

awareness and the DDA. This would also be available for public-facing employees. The first course commenced in the summer of 2003 and by end 2005 over 200 employees had attended. In 2005 the course was up-dated to include DDA 2005 and the emerging Diversity regulations. The inclusive design courses were delivered in 2004 and 2005. DDA guidance for service management is available as requested.

Complaints, Compliments and Representations

The County Council recognises the importance of customer feedback, and ensures that all customers have an equal opportunity to make complaints, compliments, representations or suggestions, regardless of ability, gender, age or race. To this end a programme of substantial change is underway. The programme seeks to provide greater and more accessible feedback channels, enabling customers to choose how, where and when they provide feedback. A new corporate feedback system will be introduced in April 2007, which will allow all County Council services to monitor and manage all types of feedback. It will highlight trends enabling us to make direct service improvements based on customer feedback. It will also assist us in ensuring that all sectors of the community received the same level and quality of service when logging a complaint, compliment, representation or suggestion. Improved processes will enable us to collect and respond to feedback better. A comprehensive training programme has been rolled out across the organisation to ensure that employees have the skills and knowledge they need to respond to customer feedback.

Employees are consulted through the new Customer Service Network and are able to influence developments in customer service, in particular with regard to feedback handling. In addition a new freepost, monitoring postcard has been developed to collect equal opportunities monitoring information and to gauge satisfaction with complaints handling. This ensures that all customers are given equal opportunity to provide feedback and that when they do they receive an equal and consistent level of service. The Council views all feedback with equal importance and encourages services to acknowledge, collect and learn from all types of feedback whether complaint, compliment, suggestion or representation.

Targeting Resources

Cambridgeshire is a rapidly growing county and statistics forecast one of the fastest growing populations in the country over the period 1999-2011. In particular the number of people aged 85+ in Cambridgeshire could grow by 67.3% by mid-2021, compared to a national figure of 52.7%. As well as managing the physical processes in delivering new facilities (such as extended schools with a key community focus, libraries, community and life-long learning and highly accessible and sustainable public transport services) the Council must also demonstrate a sound democratic and governance base from which sustainable new communities can develop.

Disabled people have the same right to access mainstream support, services, information and benefits as any other Cambridgeshire resident. Clearly there are times when specialised services will be required to meet identified need. Adult Social Care resources need to be targeted at people in most need in line with the Adult Social Care eligibility criteria (Fair Access to Care). Maximising community opportunities and mainstream services will be vital to ensure people are adequately supported to access their local communities. All Councils are experiencing financial pressures that have resource implications for all areas of the Council. The Council will continue to involve disabled people, their families and circles of support in agreeing priority issues and incorporating them into the Council's service planning processes as well as making most efficient use of shared resources with our partner organisations.

Ways of working

The County Council, as a community leader, is committed to working with other local service providers, including the District Councils, the Police, the PCT and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). By working in partnership and adopting the social model of disability we seek to remove barriers that prevent disabled people from participating and contributing fully to the communities in which they live and work.

Action Planning

The Disability Equality Scheme is linked to an action plan that focuses on the actions needed to improve access and remove barriers to access for disabled people:

- Customer focus – to ensure we provide the best and most cost efficient services to all our customers
- Communications and engagement – including how we consult and communicate with our customers and employees, working in conjunction with disabled people to provide information in accessible formats and encouraging disabled people to participate in the democratic process, both formally and informally.
- Training – general awareness raising, a range of specialist disability training and targeted DDA training to remove barriers and improve access to services
- Employment – including recruitment and retention of disabled people and the provision of supported work experience opportunities

Cambridgeshire County Council recognises that Equalities Schemes have to be 'living and dynamic' to be effective. The Corporate Diversity Group will monitor and review the Disability Equality Scheme on an annual basis and ensure that action plans, guidance and standards are updated regularly.

Regular action plan progress reports will be reported via the Council's Corporate Diversity Group to the Strategic Management Team and be provided to DIADEM, the Physical and Sensory Impairment Partnership Board and the Learning Disability Partnership Board.