

Huntingdonshire District Council

Disability Equality Scheme

Introduction

To meet our priorities of providing high quality services and effective community leadership the Council is committed to achieving equality of opportunity both as an employer and provider of services.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) has been amended; it now places important requirements on the Council, the first of these is a general duty to promote disability equality, in particular to:

- eliminate unlawful disability discrimination
- eliminate harassment of disabled people
- and promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- encourage participation of disabled persons in public life.

The general duty requires us to give due regard to promoting equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons. In some instances giving due regard to disability equality may require additional, dedicated services to enable disabled people to access services on equitable terms.

The second is a specific duty to publish a Disability Equality Scheme (DES), describing how we intend to fulfil this positive commitment and to meet our duty. In this scheme we state which of our functions and policies are relevant to the general duty and describe our arrangements for:

- Assessing, consulting and monitoring our functions and policies for likely impact on the promotion of disability equality
- Publishing the results of this assessment, consultation and monitoring
- Making sure the public have access to our services, and
- Training and developing employees so that they can respond positively to these legal requirements

Definition

The DDA defines a disabled person as someone with ‘a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities’. The Council recognises that disabilities can be wide ranging and will include sensory and mental impairment as well as mobility difficulties.

Our commitment

A commitment to equality and inclusion underpins the Councils’ approach to promoting disability equality. The Council recognises that some people do not have equal access to our services or information about them. To ensure fairness and equity in the provision of our services, some services may need to be developed to meet different needs. The Council also recognises that discrimination or exclusion

cannot always be dealt with as a single issue. Different strands, particularly those relating to race, disability, age, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, rural isolation, gender and deprivation, may combine to cause inequality and social exclusion.

About Huntingdonshire

Huntingdonshire is a large rural district, which covers an area of approximately 910 square kilometres. Nearly 157,000 people live in the district, with about 45% of the population living in the 4 market towns of Huntingdon, Ramsey, St Ives and St Neots. According to Census 2001 there were 21,263 citizens in Huntingdonshire with either a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability which limited their daily activities or the work that they did. This accounted for 13.5% of the district's population. In 2005 there were 4,500 claimants of Disability Living Allowance and 4,500 claimants of Incapacity Benefit/Severe Disablement Allowance, which is a decrease by over 10% and 8.8% respectively, compared to the number of claimants in 2001.

Life expectancy at birth in Huntingdonshire is quite high, men are expected to live up to 77.9 years of age and women can expect to live more than three and a half years longer than men. This data shows that the population in Huntingdonshire is ageing since life expectancy at birth for men in the period 1993 – 1995 was 75.0 and 80.0 for women.

Huntingdonshire's constitution

Huntingdonshire operates a Leader and Cabinet model of decision making. The Cabinet consists of 9 Members; each Cabinet member is responsible for a number of Council services and they have delegated authority to make decisions. The Executive Councillor for Resources & Policy has a specific responsibility for leading on equality issues. The Cabinet meetings are held in public, the Agenda, Reports and Minutes are publicly available. Further information is available on the council's website www.huntsdc.gov.uk or from Democratic Services.

Council Organisation and Structure

The Council is currently organised into 3 Directorates each of which is headed by a Director, these are:

- Central Services (e.g. electoral registration, licensing, personnel and economic development)
- Operational Services (e.g. planning, environmental and public health, housing services and countryside services)
- Commerce and Technology (e.g. financial services, council and housing tax benefit)

Strategic Aims for Equality

Some of the strategic initiatives set out below are specific to disability equality; others reflect the broader diversity agenda. Our policy framework is set out in our corporate plan *Growing Success* (a copy is available on the council's website or from the Policy Division) it has been developed to provide the context for our strategies, policies and plans.

Growing Success

The vision in our corporate plan is:-

Huntingdonshire is a place where –

- We can make the most of the opportunities that come from growth
- Local people can realise their potential
- We balance our social, economic and environmental needs; and
- We have a good quality of life

To be successful in this vision and to achieve sustainable development the council acknowledges that:

- Huntingdonshire is made up of many different communities
- some communities have greater or different needs than others
- equality does not mean doing the same for everyone
- to make progress we must target resources to meet the greatest
- needs
- we must consider all communities, even those with fewer needs.

To ensure that the above *aspects* are taken into account in the things that we do, the Council is committed to achieving the Equality Standard for Local Government; this is a framework that sets up a way of working which will ensure that equality in employment and the way services are provided is an important part of the Council's work.

To achieve our vision, we have selected six priorities that are important parts of the quality of life experienced by our residents, these are:

- a clean, green and attractive environment
- housing that meets local needs
- safe and active communities
- a healthy population
- accessible services and transport choices, and
- a strong and diverse local economy. For each of these priorities we have a series of objectives which set out what we plan to do.

Comprehensive Equality Policy

Our Comprehensive Equality Policy formalises our commitment to disability equality in providing high quality services and effective community leadership.

We intend to do this through the way we -

- plan and deliver services
- monitor and evaluate
- consult and engage
- develop & support employees
- support our communities

To contribute towards meeting these priorities our Comprehensive Equality Policy has identified two outcomes that we need to achieve

- That our services are provided in ways that meet the diverse needs of local people
- That the Council is recognised for promoting equality and inclusion in communities

The two measures that will tell us how successful we are:

- % of local people who believe that Council services meet their needs
- % of local people who believe that the Council promotes equality and inclusion in their community

How did we develop our Disability Equality Scheme?

We have established a Corporate Equality Steering Group, comprising senior officers who have assisted the Chief Officers Management Team in developing the DES and Action Plan. We recognise the requirement to consult; we have consulted with our stakeholders, including the Primary Care Trust, Police and neighbouring authorities. There are a number of formal and informal organisations in Huntingdonshire that represent the needs of disabled groups. We have consulted with a number of these groups to inform the development of the scheme.

Responsibility for the Disability Equality Scheme

Councillors

Councillors will support this DES and work towards the promotion of equality and inclusion in all Council and community activities.

Chief Executive

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the implementation of the DES for the council as a whole.

Directors

Directors have a duty to promote the DES throughout their directorates. They also have responsibility for implementing relevant review, monitoring and performance procedures.

Services

Heads of service, activity managers and team leaders are responsible for implementing the DES in the day-to-day delivery of their service, including the collection of data.

Employees

All employees have a responsibility to implement the DES and work towards the provision of services that meet the goals and objectives of the DES. Appropriate training will be provided to help employees achieve this.

Head of Policy

The Head of Policy will ensure that the DES is reviewed and maintained on a yearly basis, and will evaluate and verify performance data that has been provided.

Contractors

When a contractor carries out any function on behalf of the Council will be expected to conform to relevant equality legislation

Corporate Equality Steering Group

This group will lead on the implementation of the DES, help co-ordinate different activities, including

- producing guidance and information
- co-ordination of impact assessments
- production of annual report on progress

Membership of this group comprises representative from each directorate, an employee representative, representatives from Personnel and Policy Divisions. The group will report to the results from the DES 3 year action plan/annual report on progress to Chief Officers and Cabinet.

Review of Disability Equality Scheme

The Corporate Equality Steering Group will prepare an Action Plan (appendix 2) which sets out the key actions we will take to promote disability equality; this will be reviewed by the group annually. The group will also prepare an annual report of progress made towards the specifications detailed in the Disability Equality Scheme and in complying with its obligations under the DDA. This annual report will be submitted to senior officers and the Cabinet and will also be published on our website.

The council will conduct a comprehensive review of the DES every three years (next in 2009/10). This will include an assessment of how the Council has complied with its obligations under the DDA and compliance with the general and specific duties. The process of assessing policies and functions for relevance, degree of relevance and prioritisation will be repeated every 3 years.

Assessment of relevant functions and policies to the promotion of disability equality

'Functions' means the full range of the council's duties, powers and services.

'Policies' means the full range of formal and informal decisions, procedures, plans, strategies, and objectives about how we carry out our duties and use our powers.

'Relevant' means having implications for (or affecting) disability equality.

'Proportionality' means greater consideration be given to disability equality in relation to functions and policies that have the most effect on disabled people.

We have identified our functions and policies to determine their relevance to the general duty and given them a priority depending on their relevance to disability equality. The priority given determines our 3 year assessment plan e.g. those functions and policies that have been given a higher priority will be addressed in year one of the 3 year assessment plan. A table showing the prioritisation of functions and policies can be found at appendix 1.

Assessing the impact of functions and proposed policies on the promotion of disability equality

The list of functions and policies determined to be relevant to the general duty will be subject to equality impact assessments during April 2007 – April 2010, the Corporate Equality Steering Group will develop a template to assist services to conduct Equality Impact Assessments. We may combine some functions/policies within one impact assessment in order to make best use of resources. The equality impact assessment will be an integral part of achieving Level 2 of the Equality Standard and will also feature in our comprehensive management process.

Specifically, we will continue to examine each function and policy according to the priority given to it to identify whether there is evidence that they are affecting disability groups differently. To do this we will gather information in the following ways –

- use disability monitoring to collect and analyse information about people's disability to assess fair access to and use of services
- use national guidance and definitions to inform our assessments
- use historical data, including any available evidence, complaints or public concerns, survey and research findings, disability data and census results or general or specific research to assess the effectiveness of our services in promoting disability equality
- compare our policies and the way we carry out our functions with other local authorities and public bodies.

Monitoring and evaluation

Without disability monitoring data there is no way of knowing whether discrimination is taking place. We will establish and improve systems to monitor the impact of functions/policies on residents with a disability; however we will need to take into account, resource implications, sensitivity of information and willingness of people to supply it.

We will monitor and analyse our policies and functions for any adverse impact on the promotion of disability equality. We will use a range of methods to do this -

- statistical analysis of disability data
- satisfaction surveys analysed by disability group
- random or targeted surveys
- qualitative research

We will use a range of information to help us monitor and evaluate, for example the 2001 Census and other data provided by the Office of National Statistics.

We will use the same classification system for disability monitoring as that used in the 2001 Census, except where research is targeted at specific communities where more detailed information might be required.

We will incorporate consideration of the duty into review programmes, including service reviews and performance management systems.

We will use this information to determine future priorities, e.g. if evidence suggests an adverse impact we will take remedial action. We will report the findings of any monitoring and evaluation to Chief Officers and Councillors.

Consultation and engagement

We will undertake clear, representative and proportionate consultation, using a range of appropriate methods. Specifically we will try to engage people with different disabilities to ensure that any new policy does not discriminate or harm good disability relations. We will work with the representative disability groups to remove barriers to consultation with people who have a disability and to try to establish effective mechanisms for effective consultation.

We will use the results of assessment, consultation and monitoring to ensure we avoid or minimise adverse impacts on disability equality. The information will be used to understand and meet the needs of people with different disabilities and to make new arrangements or change arrangements so that our policies and the way we carry out our functions to promote disability equality. Any new arrangements or changes we make will be relevant to the nature of the policy or function and its possible effect on the public.

Access to information and services

We will ensure that information about the Council and our services is available to all sections of our communities and that services are accessible to everyone. To do this we will –

- consider access to information and services when assessing and monitoring services
- make sure our staff have the necessary skills, information and understanding to provide services and information equally and fairly
- ask local communities what services and information they need and how they want them provided
- provide information in appropriate formats upon request.

Employment

The Council is a large employer, with over 1,200 employees. In order to meet the employment specific duty in the DDA, the Council will monitor diversity within the areas below and will publish the results of its monitoring annually. Reports on

monitoring will be prepared for the Corporate Equality Steering Group, senior management and Councillors.

- staff in post
- applicants for employment, training and promotion
- those who receive training
- those who benefit or suffer detriment as a result of performance assessment procedures
- those involved in grievance procedures
- those who are the subject of disciplinary procedures
- those who leave the council's employment

We will report these findings to Chief Officers and Employment Panel. Any future revision of our DES will include the results of employment monitoring

Training

In order to deliver our responsibilities under the DDA, we will need to ensure that all staff and councillors are aware of relevant legislation and how this impacts upon their work. Over the last 3 years the Council has commissioned a training and development programme for its employees to promote an understanding of equality and its implications for meeting the council's goals and objectives. Where appropriate detailed training plans for achieving the Equality Standard for Local Government for each directorate/division will be prepared to ensure that appropriate information and training is provided which takes account of individual's responsibilities. Senior management, Councillors and employees who will be directly responsible for this Scheme will receive additional specific training.

The Council's induction programme for new employees will include initial information on the importance of equality and specifically promoting disability equality in meeting the Council's objectives.

Publication of the Disability Equality Scheme and publishing results

The DES or summary will be made available to all members of staff and to all relevant community and voluntary groups, organisations, individuals and businesses via the Internet, Intranet or hard copy. A summary of the scheme will be made available in alternative formats upon request.

A copy of the report compiled after each assessment will be available in full on our Website (www.huntsdc.gov.uk) or on request from the Policy Division, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN 01480 388032.

Where appropriate the Council will consider using or commissioning new methods of publication that are proportionate to achieving disability equality.

Complaints

Complaints about how we are meeting our duties or other complaints about disability equality will be dealt with through our established complaints procedure, which is available to all members of the public.

Appendices include:

Appendix 1 – assessment timetable

Appendix 2 – Action Plan 2007-08