

Disability Equality Scheme 2007 to 2010

“Woking Borough Council is determined that all individuals within our borough are able to play as full a part as they wish in local life and that no one, no matter what their circumstances, should be excluded.”

WBC Social Inclusion & Community Cohesion Strategy

“All members of Woking’s diverse communities have a right to enjoy the highest quality of life.”

“A healthy community requires that all of its members feel they are included and that their contribution is valued.”

WBC Being Equal – A Valuing Diversity Policy

The Disability Equality Scheme is also available on our accessible web site www.woking.gov.uk and in the following formats :

Larger print – 16 point and above

Braille

Tape or CD

Other Languages e.g. Urdu, Spanish, Italian, Chinese

Summary version in plain English or language that would be accessible to people with learning difficulties.

Please contact Refeia Zaman to obtain a copy in your preferred format. Tel : 01483 743479 , e-mail refeiazaman@woking.gov.uk or write to her at Woking Borough Council, Civic Offices, Gloucester Square, Woking, GU21 6YI

Introduction

In developing this scheme the Council is pleased to have been able to work in partnership with North West Surrey Association of Disabled People, other organisations and individuals.

We are grateful for the valuable input received so far from disabled residents, people who work with disabled people, carers and parents of disabled children and organisations supporting disability.

In taking this Scheme forward and developing an Action Plan the Council is looking forward to working with an even wider cross-section of the community regardless of race, age, religion or belief, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation and disability, recognising that language too can be a barrier to communication.

In the 1970's disabled people used their personal experiences to show that the disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by many disabled people is not the inevitable result of their disabilities or medical conditions, but stems from attitudinal and environmental barriers. This **Social Model of Disability**, developed by disabled people, recognises that while some people may have disabilities which affect who they are physically or mentally, it is the barriers in society that create or compound their disabilities. The basis of the Council's policy and practices in relation to disabled people and of the development of this Disability Equality Scheme and action plan is about identifying and removing these barriers.

The Council clearly states in its Vision and Values that it cares about people and that our customers and community are the focus of what we do. We will treat everyone with fairness and dignity, respecting people's differences and needs and behave openly and consistently.

This Disability Equality Scheme further enhances our Equality & Diversity Policy, Race Equality Scheme, Social Inclusion and Community Cohesion Strategy, Cultural Strategy, External Communications Strategy, Supporting People Strategy and the Community Strategy for Woking.

Outline of the Duty

The Government introduced in the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 a new duty for the public sector. This duty *will come* into force in December 2006. There is a general duty which applies to

all public authorities, plus additional specific duties to support the majority of public authorities in achieving the outcomes required by the general duty.

The basic requirement for a public authority when carrying out their functions is to have due regard to do the following:

- promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act
- eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disability
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life
- take steps to meet disabled peoples needs, even if this requires more favorable treatment.

Purpose of the Disability Equality Scheme (Aims & Objectives)

To ensure that disabled people are able to participate fully and equally within the communities of Woking. (aim)

This will be achieved by (objectives) :

- creating a culture within the Council amongst Members and Officers to ensure that equality is at the core of all its activities.
- making services relevant and accessible to present and future users
- targeting resources, where necessary, to groups and communities who are most at risk of exclusion.
- ensuring that the Council's involvement in the voluntary and community sector supports the empowerment and self-organisation of disability groups.
- building a workforce that is representative of the diverse communities of the borough.
- influencing others through good practice in service provision, employment and procurement.

Definition of a disabled person

For the purpose of this scheme Woking Borough Council recognises a disabled person as someone who has an impairment or a disability.

An impairment is an injury, illness, congenital condition that causes or is likely to cause loss or difference in the way the body and/or mind works.

A disability can be physical, sensory, learning, a mental health issue or unseen.

It is society that disables people who have impairments because of the way it is set up prevents such people from taking an equal part in every day life.

It is further recognised that some people will have more than one disability, some will have a disability that is unseen and that these can be compounded where there are communication and/or language difficulties.

How we intend to achieve our aim

By adopting the Social Model of Disability

A Social Model approach states that people with disabilities are disabled by physical and social barriers which prevent them from carrying out day to day activities and pursuing the same opportunities as non-disabled people. The barriers result from social structures and attitudes, rather than from a person's disability or medical condition. The Disability Equality Duty aims to understand and dismantle the barriers which exclude and limit the life chances of disabled people.

Woking Borough Council commits to this Social Model approach and will take steps to ensure that this is embedded in all service areas. The Council shall lead by example and influence others to achieve the aim of this scheme.

Through involvement

The Council's Vision and Values contains the statement "We will be approachable and regularly inform people about what is going on, we will listen to people's views and take them into account when making decisions".

By involving disabled people as a matter of course in Council activities we will improve understanding of the range of barriers faced and also help avoid mistakes rather than having to solve problems after they have occurred.

The information gained from disabled people through focus groups and from questionnaires will enable priorities to be identified and inform the action plan.

Using Equality Impact Assessments

This is a legal duty under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. The assessment is a simple tool that enables us to check whether any existing or proposed strategy, policy, service or project is discriminating (actual or perceived) against any particular group or groups of people. This is to make sure that, as far as possible, any negative consequences of any strategy, policy, service or project are eliminated or minimised and opportunities for promoting equality are maximised.

By using Equality Impact Assessments the Council will do its best to ensure that any strategy, policy, service or project does not unreasonably discriminate against any individual or group. It will assist individuals and teams within the Council to think carefully about the likely impact of their work on people in Woking and to take any appropriate action to improve our strategies, policies, services and projects.

The process for conducting Equality Impact Assessments is being built into the Council's committee report and project management structures.

Developing an Action Plan

As with any scheme, policy or strategy it is the various activities and actions implemented in support of the aim and objectives that will make the difference. A key element in developing the Action Plan will be the lead taken by the Portfolio Holder for Equalities and Social Exclusion and the inclusion of all Council Service Areas to ensure that cross cutting issues such as the safeguarding and promotion of young people's welfare and community safety are taken fully into account fully. For example, in consultation with the Council's lead officers for children and domestic abuse.

The information gained from the focus groups and questionnaire will be used to inform the development of an action plan in support of this scheme. The detailed activities and actions developed will form part of a Corporate Equality Action Plan (CEAP). This CEAP will be the Council's single action plan covering all equality issues and will be included in the Council's business planning process. The CEAP will be monitored and managed by both Councillors and Council Officers and be a living document able to be modified appropriately should priorities change and/or new issues arise.

Priorities for Woking Borough Council

As well as ensuring that we focus on delivering the aspirations of the local community, as set out in the Community Strategy, the Council has identified six priority themes that are built into everything we do. One of these is Equality.

The Council is committed to equality of opportunity for people, regardless of race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or any other differences. This commitment not to tolerate any form of discrimination and recognise the benefits of positively embracing the diversity of our community, is set out in the Council's 'Being Equal' A Valuing Diversity Policy and the Race Equality Scheme. The Disability Equality Scheme further demonstrates the Council's commitment to ensuring that equality is at the core of all its activities. Training for all staff and councillors will be essential in raising awareness of the difficulties faced by people with disabilities and the Scheme will take account of all other statutory requirements and duties placed upon the Council. These will be reflected in the Action Plan.

Priorities for Disabled People – emerging themes

Many issues were raised through the consultation process with disabled people and organisations supporting disabled people - all will need to be considered in informing the Corporate Equality Action Plan. There are four emerging themes that disabled people have told us they are concerned about. These are Transport & Street Accessibility, Employment, Accessible Services and Housing & General Living. Each of these themes was of equal importance and each contained a number of stated priorities. These emerging themes and stated priorities are summarised in Table 1.

Monitoring and reporting on progress

In order to check whether the Council is actually making a difference, and that our actions are having an impact, we need to measure our performance.

We shall monitor our progress through an Equalities Forum. This will be created with representatives from all the different groups that are at risk of experiencing inequality and exclusion. The Forum will be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Equalities and Social Exclusion, will support mutual understanding and meet twice a year to review the Action Plan.

It will be essential that the Council's staff and members are equipped to deal with all customers in a manner appropriate to their needs. Through workforce planning the resources and skills necessary to provide an appropriate, responsive and quality experience for the customer can be considered.

We will report annually on progress made with fulfilling the duty and whether our targets are being met. Progress with the Corporate Equality Action Plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis.

Revising the scheme

The scheme will be revised every 3 years and the action plan will be reviewed twice yearly by the Equalities Forum.

Table 1

Emerging themes and stated priorities from focus groups and questionnaire

Theme	1. High priority	2. Medium priority	3. Lower priority
A. Transport and street accessibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Restricted services – some services do not cross Borough boundaries. 2. Fully accessible services, particularly buses and trains. 3. Parking bays – always disabled bay which is suspended or lorries/others parked there. 4. Lack of staff to help no assisted service. 5. Improvements to street accessibility e.g. more dropped kerbs, reduce blocked pavements. 6. Diminished services at evenings and weekends. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parking de-restricted in the evening. 2. Ability of taxis to take powered wheelchairs. 3. Physical access to station - steps generally. 4. Health and Safety regulation used as a barrier to receiving help e.g. bus drivers refusing to help on such grounds. 5. Access Guides – include info on what transport is available. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Independent choice of movement. The freedom of anytime, anywhere without advanced booking. 2. Reliability of services. 3. Better utilisation of current services such as Dial-a-ride. 4. Bus No's - not visible to the visually impaired – numbers need to be bigger - both front and side - screens with locations need to be audible. 5. Taxi vouchers – who gets them – clarity of selection procedure. 6. Road crossings need to be audible – e.g. Victoria Road crossing. 7. Travel information service is no longer available. 8. Trains – assisted service – cannot just turn up. 9. Shrubs/trees/obstacles obstructing pavements.
B. Employment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring candidates are fully aware of job requirements and employers of potential limitations of individuals. 2. Health and Safety being used as a barrier. 3. Aids available e.g. for visual impairment 4. Financial incentives to companies to employ disabled people. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of integrated support e.g. Care packages do not support employment. 2. Availability of appropriate transport . 3. Going for jobs over qualified for but not getting interview – discrimination. 4. Employers don't want to employ disabled people – depends on disability. 5. Disabled people need to be made aware of what help is available - re training and help finding employment. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring job descriptions and person specifications are appropriate for the role i.e. not over specified and discriminatory. 2. Awareness of disabled people about training opportunities available. 3. Equality of education.

Table 1

Emerging themes and stated priorities from focus groups and questionnaire

Theme	High priority	Medium priority	Lower priority
C. Accessible Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hearing in group discussions – need for loop systems. 2. The small print. 3. Cash machines – not easy to use. 4. Communication needs of all not being met. 5. Low use of sports, social facilities, parks, playgrounds and events. 6. Cost and accessibility are greatest barriers to accessing social and leisure opportunities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not getting it right with new buildings. 2. Inaccessible premises – steps stairs. 3. Paperwork that can't be read e.g. because of visual impairment. 4. Doors/steps – causing problems. 5. Having to have someone with you to help. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of sufficient accessible toilets in town. 2. Accessible payment – chip and pin machines visual impairment and physical access (petrol stations). 3. More Braille signs/large print. 4. Shopping – not very visual impairment friendly - training for volunteers who help people. 5. Glass doors – actually knowing whether they are open/closed. 6. Height of counters. 7. Is consultation done at the right time – to late? 8. Not having to pre-book everywhere. 9. Restaurants – no toilets on same floor as seated area e.g. on first floor. 10. Entertainment services/getting equal access. 11. Assumptions about people's disabilities – should ask/do you require assistance.
D. Housing & General Living	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adaptations have to wait a long time to get right things – Lack of consultation about access to doors. 2. Council tenants - what sort of service is available. 3. Disparity of service between rented & home ownership. 4. High dependency on family and informal support for shopping, personal assistance and travel. 5. Lack of support for caring roles e.g. childcare. 6. Accommodation not meeting needs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of awareness - inferior services being received. 2. Information on accessible housing. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase the number of accessible public toilets.