

Disability Equality Scheme

2006-2009

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Scheme

This Scheme sets out how Dartford Council will work to ensure that disabled people are considered in all aspects of service delivery and employment. It sets out our vision and aims for disability equality across the Council, and the steps we will take to achieve these aims. This Scheme also outlines how we will assess and monitor our progress and ensure compliance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (the DDA).

1.2 Our Vision

The Council has adopted the following vision* for disability equality;

In reflecting the social model of disability, it is a right that disabled people are able to participate fully in the economic, learning, social and cultural opportunities Dartford has to offer. It is a right that we will uphold. Services that work better for disabled people are more likely to work better for all service-users.

To achieve this we will work towards:

Recognising people as rights-holders

and away from disabled people as objects of charity

Recognising people with disabilities as independent citizens and consumers

and away from people as recipients of care

Disabled people being independent decision-makers, taking responsibility for the issues which are of concern to them

and away from professionals taking decisions on behalf of disabled people

Removing barriers, revising social norms, policies, cultures and promoting accessible environments

and away from focus on individual impairments

Emphasis on ability and the provision of active support measures

and away from labeling people as dependants or unemployable

Designing a flexible world for the many

and away from designing economic and social processes for the few

Inclusion of disabled people into the mainstream

and away from unnecessary segregation in employment, education and other spheres of life

Inclusion of disability policy in the planning of services and service-delivery

and away from disability policy as an issue that only relates to specialist services or are bolted on as an afterthought

** Inspired by the Declaration of the European Congress of Disabled People, Madrid 2002.*

2. The National Context

2.1 The General Duty

The general duty applies to the Council when it carries out its functions. The Council must give 'due regard' to the need to:

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act
- Eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
- 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 persons more favourably than other persons.

2.2 The Specific Duty

Under the requirements of the specific duty, the Council should produce, implement and publish a Disability Equality Scheme. The Scheme should demonstrate how the Council intends to fulfill its general and specific duties and include a statement of;

- the way in which disabled people have been involved in the development of the Scheme
- the Council's methods for impact assessment
- steps which the Council will take towards fulfilling its general duty (the "action plan")
- the Council's arrangements for gathering information in relation to employment
- the Council's arrangements for putting the information gathered to use, in particular in reviewing the effectiveness of its action plan and in preparing subsequent Disability Equality Schemes

The Council must

- take the steps set out in its action plan within three years of the Scheme being published and put into effect the arrangements for gathering and making use of information
- Publish a report containing a summary of the steps taken under the action plan, the results of its information gathering and the use to which it has put the information.

2.3 Understanding Disability

The social model of disability

The poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by many disabled people is not the inevitable result of their impairments or medical conditions, but rather stems from attitudinal and environmental barriers. This is known as 'the social model of disability', and provides a basis for the successful implementation of the duty to promote disability equality.

When is a person disabled?

A person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

The test of whether an impairment affects normal day-to-day activities is whether it affects one of the broad categories of capacity listed in Schedule 1 to the DDA. They are:

- mobility
- manual dexterity
- physical co-ordination
- continence
- ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects
- speech, hearing or eyesight
- memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand, or
- perception of the risk of physical danger.

Further information on persons covered by the DDA is included at Appendix A.

3. The Local Context

3.1 About Dartford

At the 2001 census the total population of Dartford was 85911 although there has been an estimated rise to 87,400 in 2006. At the 2001 census 12977 people had a long term limiting illness which is 15% of the population.

The district of Dartford lies at the heart of the Thames Gateway, an area currently subject to major regeneration and renewal including proposals for future regeneration. This means that not only are we experiencing significant amounts of change in the local area, but that we have an opportunity to create first class services for local people. This is reflected in the Council's vision;

To make Dartford “the place of quality and choice, a place where people choose to live, work and enjoy their leisure time”

In support of this vision, the Council's Corporate Plan (2006/07) has identified the five priority service area themes; Citizenship and

Community, Regeneration, Leisure Time, Environment, Housing, and the corporate values Quality services and Corporate Health.

3.2 Equality and Diversity at Dartford

Dartford Council is committed to mainstreaming equality in Council services and in employment and both our Corporate Plan and the Community Strategy make specific reference to how we can make services more effective for all local people.

Dartford's **Corporate Plan** commits us to;

- Involve Dartford's communities in the decisions which affect their lives
- Ensure equal access to services

The Kent Thameside **Community Strategy** *Towards The Futureplace* commits us to;

- Capitalise on the varied contributions that various sections of the community can bring to the recreational, sporting, and cultural life of the area, including, for example: children and young people, minority ethnic and faith communities, people with disabilities, older people and the lesbian and gay communities.

Dartford Council's **Comprehensive Equality Policy** states that;

- We want to achieve equality of opportunity in all our activities, including the delivery of services to the community, as a direct employer of staff and through the various activities we fund. We will put in place a range of actions to get rid of discrimination and victimisation within the communities we serve and our workforce.

The Equality Standard for Local Government aims to encourage the integration of the equality strands of disability, gender, race, sexuality, age, and religion and faith into local government policy, focusing on service delivery and employment and pay. The Council is committed to progressing through the levels of the Equality Standard, and this Scheme has been written to compliment and co-ordinate with the equality work we are doing to achieve this, as outlined in our

Corporate Equality Action Plan. For more information, please go to www.dartford.gov.uk/equality

4. Mainstreaming Disability Equality

4.1 Current Progress

The aims and objectives contained within this Disability Equality Scheme Vision, will enable us to achieve high quality public services for disabled people whilst promoting equality of opportunity and eliminating discrimination.

We have already made several significant steps to improving disability equality across our services in recent months. These include;

- The decision to work in partnership with Disabled Go to provide comprehensive, high quality information about the locality. The Disabled Go website www.disabledgo.info provides access information, for people with disabilities, on a range of locations and facilities such as Council offices, restaurants, banks etc.
- The specific corporate objective to 'ensure equal access to services' in the Council's Corporate Plan 2006/07
- A review of the Council's Disabled Adaptions Housing Policy.
- A number of services have completed equality impact assessments on their policies which have resulted in several recommendations for improving disability equality. These can be viewed at www.dartford.gov.uk/equality
- The Orchard Theatre has introduced a Disability Access Policy to ensure all patrons are able to access and enjoy the Theatre.
- The new customer contact centre at the Civic Centre was designed and built taking into account access issues and the communication requirements of disabled people.
- Dartford's new website www.dartford.gov.uk complies with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines priority 2 (AA) on accessibility, the standard recommended by the RNIB.
- The Council is a member of the Kent wide DES Partnership Working Group, which is a partnership of public authorities in

- Kent and meets four times a year to share information and provide guidance on best practice.
- It is anticipated that all Council buildings open to the public, with the exception of the recently acquired Acacia Hall, will be accessible to disabled people, by March 2007.
 - A Corporate standard for producing information in alternative formats.
 - The Customer Service, Housing and Policy teams have established links with the Dartford Partnership, a group of people with learning disabilities in the borough.
 - A major new community facility in the borough, the Princes Park Stadium, is fully accessible.
 - Open Spaces: Darenth Country Park is accessible to disabled people and an integral part of the playground refurbishment programme is planning for use by disabled children.
 - Dartford's Local Development Framework Submission Statement of Community Involvement adopted in March 2006 includes a statement on consulting with traditionally excluded groups.

4.2 Involving Disabled People

Disabled people were involved in the drafting of this Scheme through the Dartford and Gravesham Disability Equality Reference Group, a group developed by Dartford and Gravesham Borough Councils to act as a primary consultative forum for this Scheme. This group has enabled Dartford Council to consult directly with disabled people and disabled peoples' organisations.

Membership of the group has been drawn from across Dartford and Gravesham, and comprises of stakeholders that live, work or study in either of the boroughs, who provide a broad range of support, advice and services to the disabled community as well as key individuals from other local organisations and agencies working in the disability field.

The role of this group has been to identify barriers to services for disabled people and to suggest ways of effectively removing those barriers. The group has contributed to the priorities in the Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan, and helped to develop policies that support disabled people to participate in public life.

A consultative paper was designed and produced Banter, Community Services Consultants, which provided the basis for initial engagement between the two Councils and the newly established group. This assisted the group to become fully engaged with the proposed content of the Disability Equality Scheme and enabled them to comment and influence the drafting and development of the Scheme.

The group was invited to attend two seminars on Wednesday 1 November 2006, and Monday 13 November 2006. These sessions were interactive and discussion-based, comprising of a series of workshops based around emerging themes, comments and feedback received from the group. The consultation paper and a summary of the outcomes are attached at Appendices B and C.

Council staff have been consulted through the Staff Consultative Group and through the publication of the draft Scheme on the Council's intranet.

4.3 Impact Assessment

Impact Assessment is a method of analysing the impact on equality of a proposed or existing policy or function, in order to identify ways in which that policy or service can be improved. The Council has a legal obligation to carry out impact assessments under the DDA.

Carrying out an Impact Assessment will suggest how policies could be re-designed to ensure that our decisions and activities do not disadvantage disabled people, and will help us to identify policies and practices where the Council can promote equality of opportunity and positive attitudes.

The Council already has an established process for the impact assessment of policies and functions which includes a

multidisciplinary Equality Assessment Team in which officers undertaking impact assessments for their service, share best practice, compare results and work on cross-cutting issues. The team, which meets monthly, monitors progress and oversees the production of final reports which are then presented to the Equality Steering Group and Member Champion for Equality. To date, ten impact assessment reports have been completed and these will be published at www.dartford.gov.uk/equality

5. Delivering Disability Equality

5.1 Arrangements for gathering and using information

The extent to which services and functions take account of the needs of disabled persons will be assessed by the Council through;

- Equality monitoring on customer satisfaction surveys
- Continuing to use the Dartford and Gravesham Disability Equality Reference Group to identify issues
- Ensuring disabled people who are service users have the opportunity to be involved in Council forums such as the Dartford Borough Residents Forum and the Dartford Youth Council
- Information sharing through the Corporate Monitoring Team, a team set up to investigate ways of sharing and storing equality data across Council services
- Monitoring the number of complaints received from disabled service users or which concern disability, through the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

The Council will use the evidence gathered in the ways mentioned above in reviewing the effectiveness of the action plan and in developing a revised Disability Equality Scheme in 2009. The information will be analysed annually to ascertain any emerging trends and a report produced.

5.2 Employment

The Council's information and monitoring systems in relation to employment allow us to ascertain the effect of our functions and policies on the recruitment, training and retention of our disabled employees.

The Council is an equal opportunities employer and actively promotes a workforce where diversity is valued. In 2004, the Council achieved accreditation as a Two Ticks (Positive about Disabled People) Employer.

Disabled employees currently comprise 3.1% of the Council's workforce (as of October 2006). We work to ensure employment opportunities are equally accessible to all, including our disabled employees. The Council has worked with external bodies such as the Shaw Trust on redeployment issues and regularly analyses recruitment data on disability, including applications for employment, short-listed candidates and new starters and leavers.

Diversity Training is ongoing and the Council is making arrangements to support staff who would like to learn British Sign Language. Disability is also taken into consideration during the appraisal process.

5.3 Partnership Working and Procurement

The Council will ensure in its work in partnership with other public bodies or voluntary organizations such as the *Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership* or *Children's Consortium*, that due regard is given to disability equality.

When procuring services, the Council will ensure that contractors comply with all aspects of the general duty and we will revise the standards set out in our Procurement Equality Standard (contained within our Comprehensive Equality Policy) and in standard terms and conditions of contract to include information on the DDA. The Council will ensure that contractors provide evidence, where relevant, of

compliance with the duties and that both they and Council staff, fully understand the relevance of disability equality.

5.4 Reviewing Progress

This Disability Equality Scheme will be published electronically on the Council's website in December 2006. The progress of the Scheme (action plan) will be reviewed quarterly by the Equality Steering Group and Member Champion for Equalities. Data on progress against targets will be managed and monitored through the Council's performance management system, Covalent.

A report will be published annually on the progress of;

- the action plan
- the results of information gathering
- the way this information has been used and;
- the progress of impact assessments

6. Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan

6.1 Introduction

The following action plan outlines the steps we will take to meet our duties under the DDA, over the next three years. The plan has been developed from the priorities identified by disabled people and organizations working with disabled people who took part in our involvement days in November 2006. The aims and objectives identified also support our corporate priorities as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2006/07.

6.2 Priorities for 2006 – 2009

Under our corporate commitment to improving access to services, we will;

- Continue to complete comprehensive impact assessments on prioritized council policies and functions.
- Gather more information about the experiences of disabled people with regard to Council services.
- Implement mechanisms to gather evidence of the Council's performance on disability equality.
- Contribute to further development of the Disabled Go project
- Continue to review employment practices and develop staff training

| Objective | Action | Completion Date | Lead Officer(s) |
|---|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons | | | |
| Improve access for disabled people to facilities in the borough | Work in partnership with Disabled Go to produce a detailed access guide to the town which can be accessed via the web. Use this work to identify barriers to access in Dartford. | ongoing | Policy Team |
| Ensure equality of opportunity in employment and raise the profile of disability in employment internally | Promote job opportunities to disabled people. | ongoing | HR Manager |
| | Ensure recruitment literature is available in accessible formats. | ongoing | HR Manager |
| | Monitor retention rates for disabled employees. | ongoing | HR Manager |
| | Ensure disabled employees are offered the same training opportunities as non disabled employees. | ongoing | HR Manager |
| | Produce a staff information leaflet on the new duty. | March 2007 | Policy Team |
| Objective | Action | Completion Date | Lead Officer(s) |

| 2. Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act | | | |
|---|---|--------------|----------------------------------|
| Ensure Council services take into account the needs of disabled people and do not discriminate. | Conduct impact assessments on prioritized policies and functions. | ongoing | Service Managers and Policy Team |
| | Monitor confidence of and awareness of disabled stakeholders about the existence of the Corporate Complaints Procedure. | ongoing | Corporate Complaints Officer |
| | Review procurement processes to ensure disability equality is considered. | March 2008 | Policy Team |
| | Develop guidance for staff on communicating with disabled people and on making accessible arrangements. | July 2007 | Policy Team |
| Monitor the progress of the scheme, action plan and impact assessments. | Input all actions into Covalent, the electronic performance management system. | January 2007 | Policy Team |
| | Create mechanism for making in year changes to service plans to monitor impact assessment actions. | January 2007 | Policy Team |

| Objective | Action | Completion Date | Lead Officer(s) |
|------------------|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|------------------|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---------------------------|
| | Produce quarterly progress reports for the Equality Steering Group and Member Champion. | ongoing | Policy Team |
| Ensure that disabled people have equal access to benefit and other schemes | Review the use of translated strap lines and accessible formats for publicity material. | March 2007 | Benefits Manager |
| | Establish links with welfare groups to gain a greater understanding of how to reach minority and disadvantaged groups | March 2007 | Benefits Manager |
| 3. Eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities | | | |
| Increase understanding of how our services are perceived by service users. | To include equality monitoring on all our customer surveys. | To include equality monitoring in all our customer surveys from 31 st March 2007. | Customer Services Manager |
| Promote a zero tolerance approach to harassment. | Provide staff training on disability equality as part of wider equality training | March 2007 | HR Manager |
| Objective | Action | Completion Date | Lead Officer(s) |
| 4. Promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons | | | |

| | | | |
|--|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| Use internal and external publicity to promote disability equality | Review of information contained within corporate literature (including websites and correspondence). | March 2008 | Communications Manager |
| | Promote positive images of disability. | ongoing | Communications Manager |
| Ensure we meet the needs of disabled young people | Ensure disability priorities are included in the production of the youth strategy and play strategy and at meetings of the Youth Council. | July 2007 | Policy Team |
| 5. Encourage participation by disabled persons in public life | | | |
| Enable disabled service users to directly influence and have input into Council Policy | Continue to use the Dartford and Gravesham Disability Equality Reference Group as a means of involving and consulting disabled people. | ongoing | Policy Team |
| | Continue to develop links with the Dartford Partnership. | ongoing | Policy Team |
| Objective | Action | Completion Date | Lead Officer(s) |
| 6. Take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons. | | | |

| | | | |
|--|---|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Improve the way the Council communicates with disabled service users | Promote the Language Line and Type Talk facility in the Contact Centre through signage and printed information. | March 2007 | Customer Services Manager |
| | Provide staff training on communicating with deaf or hard of hearing customers. | March 2007 | Customer Services Manager |
| | Further publicise how staff can access sign language interpreters and the corporate standard for communications, for example through <i>In Touch</i> | ongoing | Policy Team |
| | Ensure that in redrafting the Tenants Handbook the needs of disabled users (for example easy read versions and alternative formats) are taken into account. | January 2007 | Head of Housing |
| Objective | Action | Completion Date | Lead Officer(s) |
| Develop comprehensive records of customer | Relevant services to introduce equality monitoring forms and record information on the | ongoing | Service Managers |

| | | | |
|---------------------|--|------------|---|
| communication needs | departmental computer system, for example, the Academy housing management system against the “person” details. | | |
| | Services work towards the creation of a corporate system for sharing and storing equality data | March 2008 | Policy Team in consultation with the Head of Legal Services |

Appendix A

Persons covered by the DDA include:

- People who have had a disability even if they have since recovered.
- Physical or mental impairments; this includes sensory impairments, such as those affecting sight or hearing.
- People with severe disfigurements are covered by the DDA.
- Anyone who has HIV infection, cancer or multiple sclerosis
- People who are registered as blind or partially sighted, or who are certified as being blind or partially sighted by a consultant ophthalmologist

Certain conditions are to be regarded as not amounting to impairments for the purposes of the DDA. These are:

- addiction to or dependency on alcohol, nicotine, or any other substance (other than as a result of the substance being medically prescribed)
- seasonal allergic rhinitis (e.g. hay fever), except where it aggravates the effect of another condition
- tendency to set fires
- tendency to steal
- tendency to physical or sexual abuse of other persons
- exhibitionism
- voyeurism

Appendix B

Disability Equality Scheme Consultation Paper

The Disability Equality Duty is a new way for public authorities to tackle disability discrimination in a practical way by introducing policies that actively promote opportunities and so prevent discrimination taking place.

In response to this local authorities are required to produce publish and implement a Disability Equality Scheme [DES] by December 2006. The Scheme will highlight the council's priorities for improving disability support and access, and must look at the extent to which the services and other functions they provide take account of the needs of disabled people. This consultation paper forms part of the approach Gravesham Borough Council and Dartford Borough Council have taken to developing their DES.

Below are the main areas that local authorities need to look at:

- Promoting equality of opportunity for disabled people
- Eliminating discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act
- Eliminating harassment of disabled people that is related to their disability
- Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encouraging participation by disabled people in public life
- Taking steps to meet disabled people's needs, even if this requires more favorable treatment.

Definition of Disability

The Disability Discrimination Act is based on what is known as the 'Social Model of Disability' that defines that the poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by many disabled people is not the inevitable result of their impairments or medical conditions, but rather stems from attitudinal and environmental barriers. Understanding and

fully addressing these barriers is the vital factor in disabled people achieving their full potential and ultimately the measure of success in implementing the duty to promote disability equality through the scheme.

The Dartford and Gravesham Disability Equality Schemes are based on the 'Social Model of Disability'. It therefore seeks to ensure equality of opportunity and access to people with:

- A physical or sensory impairment
- Difficulties associated with learning, communication or social interaction.
- Emotional, behavioural, or mental health problems.
- Medical or health condition.

Your Involvement

The involvement of disabled stakeholders in drawing up this scheme is vital, in fact it is an essential element of the scheme. It would be easy to have superficial involvement that has no effect or, at the other extreme, involvement that overloads both disabled people and the public authority. That is why Gravesham and Dartford Borough Councils have taken the decision to establish the Dartford and Gravesham Disability Equality Reference Group, to which you now belong, to ensure that people with disabilities are key partners in the design, delivery and monitoring of this process.

This involvement will include areas such as identifying the barriers faced by disabled people, setting priorities for action plans and assisting in planning activity. This involvement will also include looking at areas such as attitudes to disability, accessibility [not just physical], communicating and promoting the scheme and monitoring success, and evaluating policies in order to further improve the councils performance in this area.

Action Plans

In an effective Disability Equality Scheme, an action plan will reflect a number of things, and should outline practical improvements to equality for disabled people with clearly identified specific outcomes. The action plan will be informed by the Dartford and Gravesham Disability Equality Reference Group, and will include the priorities of disabled people in both boroughs, linked to the strategic priorities of the authority. The action plan will also include evidence of where the issues and priorities lie and, very importantly, the specific outcomes which the authority wishes to achieve set against a realistic timetable.

Once the scheme is written and approved it will need to be published, but that is only the beginning. The core of the work is taking forward the actions, and enhancing the performance of the authority by actually improving and changing things for disabled people. The involvement of the Dartford and Gravesham Disability Equality Reference Group will be crucial to this.

Please return, together with the “about you” questionnaire, in the envelope provided.

The comments that you make will form the basis of the discussion forums at Seminar 2, which will be held at the Manor Hotel, Gravesend on 13 November 2006.

Theme 1

Effective and meaningful consultation with disabled service users and their support networks, through engagement with the following:

- Carers
- Relatives
- Friends
- Partners
- Organisations and agencies

Theme 2

Fostering positive attitudes through effective and appropriate communication.

- Information in accessible formats such as audio descriptions and enhanced captioning
- Accessible information through use of the most appropriate mediums
- Encouraging positive attitudes e.g. Bluewater [through good customer service, excellent facilities and positive use of promotional material]

This theme came through most strongly from the initial consultation.

Theme 3

The provision of accessible and appropriate buildings/ housing and facilities through the provision of:

- Seating in reception areas e.g. those with walking aids
- Desk heights for staff and public
- Telephones at correct height
- Accessible lifts and doors
- Signage
- Touch screen facilities
- Clear questions/ use of images
- Parking facilities and management of these
- Tactile buttons
- Appointments systems to avoid queuing

- Better supported housing for independent living/ warden support
- Bathing facilities
- Home visits

Theme 4

Improving the experience that a disabled service user may have when attempting to approach or communicate with the council

- Employing more staff with a disability, physical or sensory impairment, difficulties associated with learning or social interaction or medical\health conditions
- Employing more staff that have knowledge of disability, physical or sensory impairment, difficulties associated with learning or social interaction or medical\health conditions and related issues
- Better provision of training of staff in relation to all of the above, such as special skills in signing, and signers able to translate
- Financial support for local groups and organisations that offer skills training to disabled people

Theme 5

More effective networking and partnership working with support services and agencies

- Effective signposting to other agencies/ services
- Sharing of good practice
- Mapping service provision across both boroughs
- Establishing baseline data for future evaluation
- Engaging with the support networks and services
- Wider choice of social activities
- Improving the provision, awareness and accessibility of learning opportunities

We welcome any comments and views you have on this Scheme. Your opinions are important to us and will contribute to the reviews and amendments we make to this Scheme over the next three years and beyond.

To make a comment on the Scheme or action plan, please contact

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