

Disability Equality Scheme Consultation: January-February 2011 Feedback



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Introduction

As a public body, Haringey Council has a positive duty to promote disability equality and prevent unlawful discrimination against disabled people.

The council's existing Disability Equality Scheme sets out its aim to ensure that disabled people receive: **Fair treatment and equality of opportunity**. The Scheme lists three priorities to help achieve this outcome:

1. **Removing barriers to inclusion and meeting individual need**
2. **Empowering people**
3. **Ensure disability equalities principles are mainstreamed.**

During January and February 2011, we held a consultation to review the Disability Equality Scheme, including an event held in partnership with the Haringey Disability First Consortium (HDFC) in February 2011. This document lists the feedback we received from Haringey residents.

What will happen next?

A significant feature of the Equality Act 2010 is the introduction of a new single Equality Duty on all public bodies from April 2011. This brings together the existing duties on race, gender and disability and extends the list to include gender reassignment in full, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation. In addition, the Council will need to develop local equality objectives (by April 2012) and review them every four years.

A further change brought about by the Equality Act means that the Council is no longer required to have a separate Disability Equality Scheme. Instead, this information will be built into our revised Equal Opportunities Policy and our local equality objectives. As we had already begun a review of our existing Scheme, the feedback we received from the consultation will be used to inform the development of the Policy and to set our equality objectives for the next four years.

What people told us about disability equality

Do you agree with the three key priorities of the Disability Equality Scheme?

We are broadly in agreement with the three priorities.

Two further priorities are suggested:

- Make sure that disabled people know their rights and what they are entitled to and where and how to get them.
- Employment for disabled people.

“Empowering” (priority number 2) is a horrible word. “Facilitate” or “giving people tools” is better. I do not understand priority number 3 (is that jargon for something)? Affordability should be included.

Haringey Council should commit to meeting the minimum obligations of current policy/legislation (e.g. Disability Discrimination Act, Equality Act, Improving Life Chances of Disabled People and Every Child Matters).

Investigate opportunities identified in the ‘Improving Life Chances of Disabled People’ report and how these could be used, e.g. the recommendation in 2004 which said that every area of the country should have a user led organisation like a Centre for Independent Living by 2012. I don’t believe we have this in Haringey (or even plan to), so it’s possible that Haringey could miss this “Life Chances” target.

We at HDFC have focused on three main issues that impact on all aspects of wellbeing for disabled people: Transport, Housing and Communication. If dealt with properly, improving the provision of services doesn’t require a huge investment of money – just a little investment of time and thought.

The Disability Equality Scheme priorities are sound but we need to ensure there is a structure in place to follow things through.

Priority 1. Removing barriers to inclusion and meeting individual need

Disabled people are often thought of in terms of 'ill health' or 'sickness', but we want to work towards improving wellbeing.

Communication with disabled people

Writing and speaking clearly and concisely helps many people understand information. Whether someone has a learning disability, a long-term illness that makes them tired, depression which effects concentration, or if they are speaking English as a second (or third) language, something short, sweet and to the point helps. It also reduces translation and printing costs, and stress! Most of HDFC's members do not use computers and other new media, so relying on what is a pretty confusing online presence is not good enough. Training staff in how to communicate with disabled people and people from other cultures clearly, concisely and in a way that is supportive will save money, time, stress and is, we think, a reasonable adjustment.

Whilst it is a shame that there will no longer be an 'Equalities Team' in the council, we hope that this event and the production of the Easy Read version of the Disability Equality Scheme represent a move towards mainstreaming accessibility – basically meaning that all council departments and projects consider disabled and older people.

We appreciate that the Disability Equality Scheme was produced in Easy Read. We ask the council commits to producing all documents in plain English and providing training to frontline and strategic staff to understand that it is:

- a statutory obligation
- much simpler to write in 'plain English' than to try and translate documents into plain English after the fact
- a cost effective way of communicating with residents as plain English works for many people within the equalities strands (whether they are reading English as an additional language, have learning difficulties, mental health problems, or have children running around their feet) and therefore would in the short to mid term save money.

We ask that the council commits to include understanding of other communicative tools and requirements for disabled people

within this training. HDFC would be delighted to help roll-out this training, including mystery shopping.

The Disability Equality Scheme talks about the social model of disability. People don't understand what this means – this is inappropriate language to be included in the Scheme.

The Scheme needs to be written in plain English, and to have a summary version.

Commissioning and contracting services

Poor commissioning leads to poor services. If you want to consult and engage, listen to what we are saying. Don't cut services we've asked for.

There is no cross-impairment disability group in Haringey. There is a need to work with disability organisations in a more coordinated way, recognising that:

- Haringey is a very diverse borough.
- Many of our clients have 'multiple marginalisations'. These people are the hardest to reach, and yet most in need of support and least likely to get it. We ask that the council reviews the services provided to people with multiple marginalisations – particularly in the context of the 'cuts'.

Perhaps the equality impact assessments could be the starting point for this work. HDFC would be happy to help – through our partners in the voluntary and community sector – to review unmet need over the next year.

Haringey Council should demand that any partners and contractors agree to sign up to the Disability Equality Scheme, particularly if these contractors are promoted by the council within personalisation, community housing and other agendas. Organisations promoted through the council's website, information directories, etc, will be perceived to be 'OK'd' by the council whether there is a disclaimer or not!

Why is there not a worker's representative at the consultation? How does the council intend to ensure long workers' contracts given contracting out of services to the voluntary sector. Disabled people need to have time to build a relationship with their support workers.

Funding

There is a significant level of unmet need. These cuts will impact on people from all equality streams, more so if you come under more than one bracket – a disabled women, a non-white mental health service user, a bisexual older person. We hope that the council will use their Equality Impact Assessments and the Disability Equality Scheme to look at who is falling through the gaps. Some of the groups we see as being particularly affected are:

- women with no recourse to public funds and mental health issues
- people with disabilities compounded by depression which develops through isolation and ‘sense of loss’ when diagnosed
- dispersed refugees
- homosexual older people
- people with learning difficulties
- BME communities in the West of the borough where health inequalities have been clearly documented by the Department of Health.

Linked to budget cuts, how do we know that they are not going to discriminate against disabled people? Will there be a council-wide EqIA that will look at the overall impact of all the budget cuts? What’s the point if the public were to see these documents once the changes have already been implemented?

If an impact assessment does show a service is essential to its users and cannot be adequately replaced, will the council decide to keep that service open?

People have to take what they’re given. Are people who make their voices heard the most likely to get funding? The last people to suffer from cuts should be vulnerable groups.

Vulnerable people should be protected from cuts and the Council should join other councils, campaign against these cuts and if necessary refuse to implement them.

Reduce expenditure on private consultancies and direct the resulting savings to services. (Stuart Young responded that the Council was trying to cut costs of employment and the use of consultants to save money and reduce the risks on vulnerable people).

The potential impact of the cut in Disabled Living Allowance funding – would the Council cover the shortfall?

Discrimination

Can the council take the government to court under the Human Rights Act for discriminating against a poor borough, either individually or as a coalition?

Mental health discrimination is still quite prominent. The Disability Discrimination Act is weak and the feeling is that it is not being enforced.

Prevent hate crime, and prevent harassment in schools.

Priority 2. Empowering people

Choosing the right services

We need more advocacy services delivered by advocates who are trained, empathetic to disabled people's problems and are independent of the Council, to help people with disabilities gain access to services they are entitled to. We need someone to speak up on behalf of disabled people – they are too often blocked by council 'gate-keepers'. Vulnerable people need extra help to get access to things that they are entitled to.

The Personalisation agenda is supposed to be about facilitating choice, but what choice is there for disabled people? (later in the event, there was a presentation on the Personalisation agenda).

This is a time where massive cuts are being made to all services. This is affecting people with long term health conditions more than any other section of society. Disabled Living Allowance, Independent Living Fund, Taxi Card, Dial-A-Ride, Access to Work Fund, removal of legal aid for children with Special Educational Needs, Housing Benefit, privatisation of the NHS and the promotion of personalisation leave us with choice. But choice between what?

Improve access to health and social care services.

Paying for services

Do personal budgets mean getting better value for money? We need to support disabled people through the social enterprise sector, not just through councils. i.e. look at things a little more

differently; other sectors may be able to provide services in a more efficient way.

Not everyone will get a personalised budget but the wording in the Easy Read version of the Disability Equality Scheme implies that they will.

Money for direct payments is not mentioned – is it a choice if people are required to use in-house services?

Everyone needs to have a greater understanding of disability and of the barriers.

Does everyone want choice over housing? Is it imposed? Do people find it hard to manage?

Employment

There needs to be an improvement in mainstream employment opportunities. Employment is very important. Disabled people find it difficult to find, especially in light of the budget cuts and we don't feel confident about finding jobs in the future.

Priority 3: Ensure disability equalities principles are mainstreamed

Access to transport

I am very worried about the Mayor's new bus design and feel that bus travel could be taking a step backwards. It is therefore critical that the council does everything possible to put its weight behind mainstreaming and improving local travel opportunities.

We need to continue with the commitment shown by the Haringey Transport Forum to make reasonable adjustments to involve Haringey's older and disabled residents in discussions and decisions around transport. This needs to include training the police, public transport providers and the public in understanding the difference between 'anti social behaviour' and the symptoms of mental ill health and addiction. There also needs to be a commitment to reviewing the effectiveness of and service user involvement in Haringey's community transport provision, including Shopmobility and Hackney Community Transport, as services for disabled people.

We have a Transport Forum sub-group call 'Out and About' as transport and mobility affect every part of people's lives. It doesn't

matter if a service has a ramp or a low counter top, if you can't get to it, it is not accessible. Joan Hancox and Cllr Canver have brought forward the time of the council's Transport Forum so we can attend. Thank you ... but there is still plenty to do.

Housing

We ask that the council sets up an independent access group for housing, as is the case in most other boroughs, to assess planning applications, changes to housing allocations, etc. We believe that engaging disabled and older people early on in the process will save money and reduce complaints, public law cases and involvement of ombudsmen. We have a Housing and Access sub-group 'Haringey is Where the Heart Is' that could be a starting point.

There is a real issue about appropriate accessible and life-time homes, and a clear lack of understanding about disability and mobility from urban planning in the borough. HDFC, with Tracey Proudlock, hosted the North London Accessible Housing Register event last year and set-up a sub-group on housing and access, the first meeting of which includes a presentation from Strategic Planning.

Planning

We would like to see the council commit to having an independent access group, like so many other boroughs, so that disabled people and other residents are able to give their insight and expertise at the earliest possible stages. For example, the diagonal crossing at Wood Green had to be made deliberately inaccessible – because no disabled people were asked for their input. This means that council and other agencies have invested in a crossing that doubly discriminates against people with mobility issues and visual impairments.

There is a lack of understanding of mobility issues in planning. An Access Group of disabled people and allies would be able to promote inclusive design. None of the professionals on the current Planning Group are disabled, and yet their role is to assess aspects of major development. The brief of a disabled representative(s) could be to assess the principles of inclusive design. An Access Group should be supported by the Council with training in how to read plans or assess drawings.

What are we doing well and what could we improve on?

What people said we do well on:

- There is commitment, but for this to be realised it must be supported and translated into action and visible positive outcomes for disabled people.
- Personalisation in adult social care is positive – putting people in control.
- The Occupational Therapy service is helpful.
- Supporting a resource centre like the Winkfield Centre.
- The council's hands-off approach in the way it runs the Clarendon Centre.
- The A-Team at the 684 Centre is really effective. But funding is under threat. Haringey has some of the highest figures for mental health in UK.
- William House Tuition Centre provides a fantastic service for school children with a disability, improving achievements. But there is concern that cuts will target services like this which will have considerable impact on this vulnerable group. Even the education service is unaware of this centre.
- Specialist services are much appreciated – they are very good, able to meet specific needs. But concern about future funding.
- Haringey Sixth Form Centre provides a very good service.

What people said we could improve on:

- Disabled people are not aware of what services are available.
- There is goodwill on the part of the Council, but again, not often translated into action or supported with resources.
- Council staff at the frontline could have more empathy with disabled people. They are often seen more as gatekeepers who are there to say 'no' instead of helping.
- Funding for voluntary groups could prove a cost effective way for the council to meet its commitments.
- We don't allow social enterprises to grow – services are too top heavy.
- More should be done to help disabled people to find work.
- More apprenticeships for disabled people (the present offer does not serve disabled people at all well: they are required to go to college for theory work while they are with an employer.

The feedback is that this is a waste of time for many disabled people who would prefer more focus on the practical).

- Day centres should be known as resource centres.
- Can disabled people be prioritised for housing lists?
- We need to improve communication with British Sign Language (BSL) users
 - There should be greater use of sign language, especially in regard to BSL users
 - Budget holders usually say that sign language is too expensive to hire.
 - VRS pilots (Video Relay Services technology). The council should look to provide this service; it is being used in customer services at Station Road but should be more widely available.
 - The council has a translation service – are there any deaf people represented or working in the service?
 - Deaf people should be able to text a message to the council. They have some of the highest usage of text messaging.
 - Related to technology, services should look at new criteria for building in the ability to access technology as part of their service delivery.
 - Can the council provide feedback on how many deaf people are employed?
 - The Disability Equality Scheme should be used to inform consultations and who we consult with – the principles must be mainstreamed across council work.

Feedback on the content of the Disability Equality Scheme review document

- *Scope:* include a commitment to “Affordability” (i.e. keeping rents low and council tax affordable – since not all disabled people receive either high benefits or high wages. Quite a few are not very well off at all).
- *National context:* Are there any other actions that you think we should include in the above list of Council duties?
Again, include a commitment to “affordability” as this will be what will make disabled people “worse off”.
Equality in housing is also important.
- *Demographic profile:* the document states that the west is more affluent”; it is also the most neglected by the Council (especially

North Hill); everything always seems to go to Tottenham and Wood Green: that is not fair to people in the “more affluent” areas. Treat the borough equally!

- *Identifying and meeting our obligations:* The council must not forget that many disabled people are not receiving Council services and are “unknown” to any of the Council’s services or the Department for Work and Pensions.
- *Our principles: service delivery: Is there anything else you would like included?* No, but ensure that “un-disabled” people don’t get annoyed (example: accessibility will slow everything else down: a bus that needs to lower the floor or even pulls out a ramp adds about 2 minutes waiting time, “inconveniencing 30 others for just one person”, thus automatically drawing attention to the one). You need to ensure “subtlety” in the delivery.
- *Our principles: employment:* As above, ensure that un-disabled people don’t get annoyed.
- *Do you think there is anything else we should have done to develop the Scheme that we can consider in the future?* Yes: I never knew about any of this, and I am disabled. But I am one of those undetected because I am in low paid employment, full time, and do not use the council’s disability services, nor do I get benefits. I always tick the boxes “Do you consider yourself disabled?” as “yes” in any feedback to the council, so it’s obviously ignored.
- *Do you think we should include anything else?* Yes, that the “equality and diversity” questionnaire gets carbon copied to the relevant team.