



**Disability Equality  
Strategy**

**and**

**Disability Equality Action  
Plan**

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## **Legal Obligations to Disability Equality**

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to produce a Disability Equality Scheme, which can be part of a wider equalities scheme.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended by the Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Act 2005 places a general duty on a wide range of authorities to promote disability equality. This duty means that in everything they do authorities should have a 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; and
- take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons.

Publishing a Disability Equality Scheme shows that the public authority is accountable for its proposal for meeting the duty. This is also an opportunity for the authority to explain the values, principles and standards that guide its approach to disability equality.

The duty aims to make the promotion of disability equality central to the way public authorities work and promoting disability equality will improve the delivery of public services for everyone.

The Statutory Code of Practice states that a Public Authority such as East Herts Council must take the following actions to comply with the general duty:

- Mainstreaming and impact assessment
- Gathering and analysing data
- Prioritising remedial data
- Involving disabled people; and
- Public reporting - transparency

If a public authority does not meet any of its specific duties, it could face enforcement action by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) under section 49E of the amended Disability Discrimination Act.

## Background to East Herts Council

East Herts is situated in the diverse County of Hertfordshire within the South East of England. At the time of the 2001 census it had a population of 128,919. Of those 12.4% said that they had a limiting long-term illness and 5.8% said that their general health was 'not good'. If these two groups are used as the basis for estimating the number of people that may meet the Disability Discrimination Act definition of a disabled person then that equates to 18.2% of the population, or just over 23,000 people.

Estimated population with disabilities in East Hertfordshire

Total	Long term limiting illness	General health 'Not good'
128,919	16,049	7,509
100%	12.4%	5.8%

## **East Herts Council Disability Equality Values.**

East Herts is predominantly rural, and this can lead to particular communities and individuals becoming isolated and disadvantaged as a result of where they live. That isolation can doubly disadvantage disability groups who may already face social and institutional discrimination.

East Herts Council's corporate vision is "To improve the quality of people's lives and preserve all that is best in East Herts". This will be achieved through the following corporate priorities and objectives:

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Priority</b>   | <b>Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable</b>                             |
| <b>Objective:</b> | Work with our partners to improve the safety of our communities, through the introduction of neighbourhood policing and developing our crime prevention partnership. |
| <b>Objective:</b> | Ensure access to opportunities to take part in sport, leisure and cultural community activities.   |
| <b>Objective:</b> | Proactively ensure that vulnerable people have access to relevant benefits and support.  |
| <b>Objective:</b> | Improve the safety, health and wellbeing of the community through promotion, regulation and working with others.   |

- Priority** **Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation**
- Objective:** Provide adequate, effective and sustainable resources to deliver council priorities, with 2.5% efficiency each year and a Council Tax increase under 5%.
- Objective:** Achieve an unqualified Corporate Governance statement of assurance by June 2007.
- Objective:** Ensure effective performance management is used to deliver success and continuous service improvement year on year by 2% overall.
- Objective:** Improve overall resident satisfaction with the Council by 2% and staff satisfaction by 2% (using the most recent Best Value Performance Indicator Survey, our Residents Survey and our Staff Survey as the measurement tool).

- Priority** **Improve standards of the neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages**
- Objective:** Implement a range of initiatives to improve and sustain environmental quality.
- Objective:** Develop and deliver a publicity campaign to raise awareness and change behaviour on environmental crime.
- Objective:** Develop and implement new policies and initiatives to increase enforcement activity against environmental crime.

- Priority**      **Care for and improve our natural and built environment**
- Protect the natural environment through:
- Objective:**
- Waste minimisation and recycling
  - Conserving and protecting the local and wider environment
  - Sustainable management of natural resources
- Objective:**      Ensure that new and existing developments meet all statutory and policy requirements and are well designed, of high quality construction and are sustainable.
- Objective:**      Encourage developers, property owners and occupiers towards responsible energy efficient building usage.
- Objective:**      Develop a cost effective, integrated and sustainable transport plan by 2011 in order to provide a basis for decision on the Council's role in the future.
- Priority**      **Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public**
- Objective:**      Lead the Local Strategic Partnership and deliver the Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement targets and ensure co-ordination with our own priorities.
- Objective:**      Develop a strategy for young people in our community.
- Objective:**      Encourage more resident participation in the Council and in democracy.

- Priority** **Safeguard and enhance our unique mix of rural and urban communities, ensuring sustainable, economic and social opportunities including the continuation of effective development control and other measures**
- Objective:** Maximise community engagement in the Local and Regional Planning processes supported by formal alliances and partnership, including protecting the green belt.
- Objective:** Seek a well-balanced local economy by the provision of employment land, and encouraging across all sectors economic opportunities, business support and workforce development.
- Objective:** Plan, manage and monitor the core role of the Council as the co-ordinator of local planning policy to ensure appropriate development and infrastructure provision in order to maintain our sustainable communities.
- Objective:** Seek to enable 40% affordable housing on all major and other relevant development sites across the planning period up to 2011.

The Council's Diversity and Equalities Policy sets out its commitment to equality of opportunity, including to disability groups as follows:

"East Herts Council is firmly committed to providing and promoting equality for all its employees and the wider community. The inclusion of all individuals and the equality of opportunity are key objectives of the Council's Corporate Priorities and Objectives. The Council has adopted an equalities strategy that will ensure equality influences the way we provide services and the employment of staff. To achieve this we will endeavour to create an environment in which there is respect for every individual and recognition that no member of the public, employee, potential employee, service user and councillor will be discriminated against irrespective of their gender, race, ethnicity, colour, marital status, disability, age, sexuality, family responsibilities, religion, trade union involvement or political beliefs. Neither shall they be disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be shown to be justifiable



for health and safety or legal reasons. This is not an exhaustive list and the Council recognises that there are other groups who may face unlawful discrimination.”

### **Moving disability equality duties and obligations forward.**

The Council has 50 Members, 6 of which make up the Executive with Executive member for Community Development having responsibility for Diversity. The Council has a Chief Executive and 6 Directors. The Director of Policy is the lead Director for Diversity.

Internally at East Herts Council a Valuing Diversity Action Group has been set up to carry forward corporate cross cutting and countywide developments in equality and disability relations policy. The group includes representatives from various service areas, Directors board and Unison. Members of the group endeavour to attend and participate in any countywide networks with a focus on equality.

East Herts Council is responsible for the delivery of many services within the district including:

- Planning/Development Control
- Environmental Health
- Benefits
- Revenues
- Housing
- Democratic Services
- Leisure Services

All services should include disability and equalities targets within their Service Plans. Each Head of Service is responsible for ensuring that this happens. The targets set should be integrated into policy and best value reviews.

## **Employees with disabilities in East Herts Council**

East Herts Council is a Two Ticks employer, which means we are positive about disabled people. As such the Council subscribes to the following five commitments:

- to interview all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and consider them on their abilities
- to ensure there is a mechanism in place to discuss, at any time, but at least once a year, with disabled employees what can be done to make sure they can develop and use their abilities
- to make every effort when employees become disabled to make sure they stay in employment
- to take action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness needed to make these commitments work
- each year to review the five commitments and what has been achieved, plan ways to improve on them and let employees and Jobcentre Plus know about progress and future plans.

The Council monitors the recruitment, development and retention of its employees under the obligations of the Equalities Standards.

A voluntary survey of staff for the year 2005 / 2006 identified that 4.35% of East Herts Council employees have a disability. This is in excess of our target for the year of 3.80% and represents an increase of over 0.5% on the 3.75% surveyed in 2004 / 2005.

A target has been set to achieve 5.88% of top earners at the council to be people with disabilities by the end of 2007. This represents the appointment of one person with a disability to the senior management team. This target has been set on the basis that Human Resources will be developing and implementing a Human Resources equalities strategy and programme designed to encourage applications from a wider range of candidates to increase the diversity of our workforce.

The Council has published a 'Policy and Procedure for Employing and Retaining People with Disabilities'. The purpose of this document is to ensure that East Herts Council complies with its legal obligations in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 by providing a framework for managers in their dealings either with disabled people who apply for jobs with the Council or with people who become disabled whilst working for the Council. The policy, procedure and guidance are designed to ensure that people with disabilities not subjected to unlawful discrimination. A full version of the document is available from the Human Resources department.

### **Consultation with the community**

The Council has an Access Advisory Group which was established in 2002. The membership consists of representatives from many of the district's disability organisations. The scope of the group is to:

- Act as a formal advisory and consultative group to the Council on matters relating to:
  - i] Council policies and procedures concerning access to services, physical access to Council premises and other Council venues, specific Council developments and initiatives.
  - ii] Other issues affecting access to Council services such as communication, information and mobility. Other developments and initiatives in which the Council has an interest either as a partner or as a regulator.
- Act as an advisory and consultative group to other organisations in East Herts as appropriate.
- Make recommendations to Council Departments on issues affecting access to Council services. Raise access issues with elected Members via the administrative structure.

To support the development of this strategy a questionnaire was sent to disabled residents of the district and made available on the Council's website. The 250 responses will allow the Council to

identify the priorities of people with disabilities when accessing council services and to take remedial action, whilst steps are taken under the action plan are to enable adequate statistical measurement of progress against the general duty.

This questionnaire marks the beginning of a sustained relationship with disabled people in the district and will lead to further consultation events with respondents who have signalled an interest in furthering their involvement in the development of the scheme.

The Council's East Herts Valuing People group has undertaken a consultation with service users with learning difficulties and their representative organisations to learn of their experiences whilst using services in the District. Acting on this advice, an action plan has been developed that will be enacted by the end of December 2006.

### **Assessing the use and impact of services**

As part of its commitment to achieving the objectives of the Equalities Standards, the Council undertakes needs / impact assessment using the Impact Assessment Toolkit. Each service sets targeted, measurable and relevant equality performance indicators, taking into account the information obtained through analysis of equality data, which are reported to Elected Members on an annual basis.

Within each Service Area's equality action planning process, priorities will be identified to monitor services by age, disability, ethnicity and gender in order to: -

- Improve service provision to all users and potential users of our services including ethnic minority and disabled people.
- Identify where changes can be made
- Target better budgets and other resources to address need.
- Feed equality data analysis into the service and business planning process
- Recognise, celebrate and disseminate information on improvements and best practice

- Assess the impact of policies and functions on different groups
- Assess how different groups are affected by the function or policy, as employees and users or possible users of services

As part of the Disability Equality Strategy the Council will undertake an assessment of its policies and functions, as well as other community consultation.

## **Targets**

This Disability Equality Scheme will be linked into the Council's objective to work through the levels set within the Equality Standard for Local Government. Targets for progression through the Equality Standard are as follows:

- Level 1 requires that the authority has adopted a comprehensive equality policy including commitments to develop equality targets, commitment to consultation and impact assessment, and to monitoring, auditing and scrutiny.
- Level 2 requires that the authority has engaged in an impact and needs assessment, a consultation process and an equality action planning process for employment and service delivery.
- Level 3 requires that the authority has completed the equality action planning process, set objectives and targets and established information and monitoring systems to assess progress.
- Level 4 - authority has developed information and monitoring systems that enable it to assess progress towards achieving specific targets.
- Level 5 requires that the authority has achieved targets, reviewed them and reset new targets.

It is East Herts Council's objective to achieve level 3 by March 2009.

## **Monitoring arrangements.**

The current monitoring arrangements are delivered primarily corporately, through performance management and the following Best Value Indicators, reported quarterly to Performance Scrutiny Committee and published annually in the Best Value Performance plan

- BV2 – Equality Standard for Local Government adopted in 2003
- BV 11c- The percentage of top 5% of earners with a disability
- BV 16-The percentage of local authority employees with a disability compared with the percentage of the economically active population with a disability in the authority area.

The adoption of the Equalities Standard will monitor progress with promotion of disability equality, together with gender, race and other equalities issues as appropriate. However, this Disability Equality Strategy intends to identify those services and functions which will be subject to particular scrutiny in relation to issues of disability promotion over the next three years.

Each Head of Service is responsible for monitoring its core services. East Herts along with the County Council, Police Authority and five other district councils have taken a contract through MORI for them to set up a selection of citizen's panels consisting of 2000 Hertfordshire residents that can be used as a consultation mechanism for a variety of issues.

## **East Herts Council Disability Equality Promotion**

Success in the promotion of disability equality will require leadership, commitment and resources from Members and senior officers. Councillors, Directors and Heads of Service will need to ensure that monitoring of developments in disability relations, promotion and equality of access are implemented and monitored at service level.

Success will depend on the proactive development of activities, training, procedures and remedial action to meet ongoing needs, as well as ongoing monitoring. Each division within the authority will need to work towards establishing standards, targets and procedural guidance where necessary.

### **Objectives of the Action Plan**

To effectively address the requirements of people with disabilities in East Hertfordshire the first step in drawing up the initial action plan has been to assess whether we possess sufficient information upon which to formulate an action plan.

As such the initial 3-year action plan concentrates on the accumulation of baseline information and developing new mechanisms for gathering evidence on the authority's performance in relation to disability equality.

This will enable adequate measurement of progress against the general duty to promote disability equality, which in turn will lead to meeting the bulk of the Duty in future years.

## Disability Equality Action Plan 2006

### Employment

Action	Responsible Department / Officer	Outcomes	Timescale
Human Resources to monitor employment following recommendations of the DRC Guidance on Gathering and Analysing Evidence to Inform Action	Human Resources	Collection of information to continue.  Annual report produced detailing comparisons between disabled and non-disabled employees in recruitment, training and retention.	Ongoing  December 2007
Establish the number of disabled people of working age in East Hertfordshire.	Human Resources / Access and Partnerships Officer	An accurate figure established leading to appropriate targets to be set in future Disability Equality Schemes	January 2007
Seek to achieve representative workforce	Human Resources	Present monitoring procedures improved to facilitate greater disclosure of the personal circumstances of current workforce.	March 2009



		<p>Investigation undertaken into of attracting more applicants with disabilities to council vacancies.</p> <p>Percentage of workforce with disabilities to match percentage of disabled people in East Hertfordshire of working age. Measured through BV 16a percentage of employees with a disability.</p>	
Investigate the feasibility of establishing a disabled employees group to be consulted on issues involving recruitment, training and retention.	Human Resources	Feasibility researched and a report produced for the HR committee.	June 2007
All staff to receive training in disability awareness to ensure the needs of disabled service users are understood.	Human Resources	<p>Training programme established suitable for employees at all management levels.</p> <p>All staff to have undertaken disability awareness training.</p>	December 2007

To develop a flexible working policy	Human Resources	A flexible working policy is developed to assist managers in fulfilling their duties to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees.	December 2006
To develop a harassment policy	Human Resources	<p>A harassment policy is developed including specific reference to disability harassment.</p> <p>Associated monitoring forms to include measures for recording instances of harassment on the grounds of disability.</p>	March 2007

## Consultation and user involvement

Action	Responsible Department /Officer	Outcomes	Timescale
Services to collect data on service users with disabilities in line with the Disability Rights Commission [DRC] Guidance on Gathering and Analysing Evidence to Inform Action.		<p>Guidance produced to advise departments on how to collect data on service users with disabilities in line with DRC guidance.</p> <p>Annual report covering all recommended areas showing comparisons between disabled and non-disabled service users and customers.</p>	<p>March 2007</p> <p>March 2008</p>
Access Advisory Group's role reviewed to ensure that it has the capacity to be involved in the work of the Council and is fully representative of the disabled population of the District.	Access and Partnerships Officer	<p>Review undertaken in consultation with existing Access Advisory Group.</p> <p>Report produced and presented to Corporate Management Team.</p>	April 2007

Analyse results of questionnaire to establish priorities for disabled people in East Hertfordshire	Access and Partnerships Officer	<p>Areas of specific concern for disabled residents established.</p> <p>Investigations into these areas prioritised in conjunction with impact assessment process.</p> <p>Service developments reported to respective Service Heads to be fed through the service planning process.</p>	November 2006
Consultation events to be held	Access and Partnerships Officer	To hold consultation events to establish barriers to council services and develop solutions to them.	March 2007
Departments to ensure all advisory groups / satisfaction surveys fully representative of the population of the district.	All Departments	All consultation literature to contain diversity questions with disabled element as standard and, where appropriate, impairment specific.	March 2008
To ensure disabled children involved in the development of council policies.	Community Development	To engage with local schools to ensure that disabled children are involved in the development of the Disability Equality Strategy.	July 2007

All public meetings to be held in venues accessible to people with disabilities	Access and Partnerships Officer/ All Departments	Minimum access requirements for buildings produced as guidance for departments when using venues.  Guidance adopted by all departments.	December 2007
Involve stakeholder groups of disabled people in the forthcoming review of parking policies.	Contract Services	Parking officers to attend consultation events and Access Advisory Group to ensure the views of disabled people are considered in the review.	March 2007
Audit of printed materials across the council to ensure they meet the Council's commitment to RNIB 'See it right' standards.	Access and Partnerships Officer	Audit conducted and report presented to Corporate Management Team.	December 2006

## Service Provision

Action	Responsible Department /Officer	Outcomes	Timescale
<p>Departments to monitor service users following recommendations of the DRC Guidance on Gathering and Analysing Evidence to Inform Action,</p>	<p>All Departments</p>	<p>Statistical information gathered and reported.</p> <p>Evidence gathered used to inform actions in subsequent Disability Equality Strategies</p>	<p>March 2007</p>
<p>All services to continue to conduct impact assessments annually as part of the service planning process, in line with Equality Standards to ensure that disabled people are not adversely affected by their policies.</p>	<p>All Departments</p>	<p>Impact assessments continue to be conducted using the East Herts Impact assessment toolkit.</p> <p>All findings and remedial actions worked into departments' annual service plans.</p>	<p>March 2007</p>

<p>All departments to consult revised Access Advisory Group on access to the services they provide.</p>	<p>Access and Partnerships Officer</p> <p>All Departments</p>	<p>Timetable of consultation with the Access Advisory Group to be established.</p> <p>All departments to have engaged the group on their services. Results to aid impact assessment process and, consequently, feed into service plans.</p>	<p>June 2007</p> <p>Ongoing until December 2009</p>
<p>Access is promoted within services contracted by EHC in line with the DED Statutory Code of Practice.</p>	<p>Performance</p>	<p>Guidance developed to include specific requirements on contractors to demonstrate commitment to disability equality.</p> <p>Disability Equality is integrated into the procurement process.</p>	<p>December 2007</p>
<p>Work with local partners to improve the lives of disabled people in East Herts</p>	<p>Access and Partnerships Officer</p>	<p>Questionnaire results exchanged with Herts County Council, Primary Care Trusts other local partners to improve the standard of living for disabled people in East Herts.</p>	<p>December 2006</p>

## Publication Of Disability Equality Scheme

Action	Responsible Department /Officer	Outcomes	Timescale
Training and/or briefings for all staff on the Disability Equality Scheme and the Disability Equality Duty.	Human Resources	<p>Training programme established suitable for employees at all management levels.</p> <p>All staff to have undertaken disability awareness training.</p>	December 2007
Production of an annual report summarising the Council's progress in fulfilling the Disability equality Duty.	Access and Partnerships Officer	A report is published listing the steps that have been taken to fulfil the Duty, the results of information gathered and what actions have been taken on this evidence.	December 2007
To review the Disability Equality Strategy and Action Plan	Access and Partnerships Officer	Completion of 2006 Action Plan and production of new plan.	December 2009