Disability Equality Scheme
“Let’s focus on what really matters”.

Waltham Forest Council - Year One Progress Report
December 2007

Introduction

Welcome to Waltham Forest Council's progress report on the first year of the Disability Equality Scheme.

During 2006 with the help of a diverse group of 200 disabled people the Council prepared its first Disability Equality Scheme. The largest discussion with disabled people took place at the "Big Disability Conversation" and involved councillors, senior managers and the Council's disabled staff. During this discussion three priorities were identified and a three-year action plan was created to achieve these. The priorities agreed were to enable disabled people to:

- Get out and about
- Get their voices heard, and
- Live independently

Over a third of the activity set out in the action plan was based on disabled people's ideas. This report has been prepared to let disabled people know the progress the Council has made during the first year of the scheme.

PRIORITY 1 - Getting out and about

During the “Big Disability Conversation” it was decided that disabled people wanted the Council to take steps to:

Tackle the harassment of disabled people in the borough

The Council’s Hate Crime Project Board are raising awareness of all forms of hate crime. The board is a multi agency forum consisting of representatives from the Police, housing partners and disability organisations. In particular the Board is keen to produce publicity that will raise awareness of Disability Hate Crime and its impact. New publicity material is currently being developed and will be distributed by March 2008.

Increase access to public buildings and the physical environment

Almost half of Council buildings are now accessible to disabled people (48 per cent), an increase of 4.98 per cent from 2006/7. The Council is currently on target to increase this to 50 per cent by the end of March 2008 and is aiming for 75 per cent by 2010.

To increase access to facilities across the Borough a group of Council officers have drafted a plan and budget to develop and publish a public access guide to facilities in the borough in time for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012. The group had their first meeting in October 2007 to look at the options, more will be reported on this as the work develops.

To help the Council keep the pavements clear of obstacles such as overgrown bushes and broken pavements an article will be published in WFM (January 2008) explaining how people can report these issues to the WFD shops so that the Council can take action to clear them.

Provide more accessible toilets

In June 2007 the Council introduced a new “Community Toilet Scheme” in partnership with local businesses. As a result the number of toilets accessible for disabled people has increased from five to 14.

Our aim is to have a minimum of one in each town centre across the borough. At present only Leyton is without an accessible toilet and the Council is working to resolve this by April 2008. More accessible toilets may become available in future years. The final number will depend on the businesses/members the Council sign up for the scheme and whether or not they have accessible toilets.

Prevent the abuse of disabled staff parking bays and make the Blue Badge Scheme simpler and improve the procedure to discourage abuse and theft

Abuse of disabled staff parking bays
To prevent the abuse of disabled parking bays at Council premises the Council sent reminders to all its staff about the proper use of these bays. The Disability Equality Working Group (DEWG) has reported a great reduction in the abuse of disabled parking bays at Silver Birch House on Blackhorse Lane. The bays are now allocated to disabled members of staff and have their registration numbers on them. If a car which does not match this registration is parked in a bay an organisation wide email is sent out straight away asking the individual to move their car immediately. Members of Staff and the Executive Director for Adult and Community Services regularly check to ensure undesignated cars are not in the bays.

Blue Badge Scheme
The Council has reviewed the process for the Blue Badge Scheme. Although the Council cannot change the eligibility criteria set by government, by reviewing the process the turnaround has been reduced six weeks to five days.

Policing of blue badge
To increase security and prevent theft the Council was one of the first borough’s to introduce hologram security onto badges, this has since been adopted by the Government as a standard feature of badges. The Council also offer anti-theft blue badges to

customers at cost price from our new office in the Alpha Business Centre, which is more centrally located than the previous office in Chingford.

To tackle abuse the Council's mobility team works with the NCP and the Police. Together they undertake regular patrols and check vehicles for illegal blue badges. Every month the Council's mobility team sends a report to the police and NCP about all the badges that have been lost or stolen. Since May 2007 the Council has confiscated 40 illegal badges.

Lobby Transport for London to support accessible transport for people in the borough

Waltham Forest Council is working in partnership with Transport for London (TfL) to improve accessibility of local transport. London Bus Services is a division of TfL and also comes under the control of the Mayor of London. Making London's transport system accessible to everyone is a key aim of the Mayor's Transport Strategy. The entire fleet of 8,000 buses in London is being converted to low floor operation. The Council is progressively converting all Waltham Forest bus stops to accessible standards using annual TfL funding.

There are 300 bus stops in the borough. In 2005/06 70 bus stops were fully accessible. In 2006/07 95 were fully accessible. Through TfL funding, 25 bus stops will be made accessible each year.

In order for local voices to be heard the Council has a Transport Liaison Consultative Group (TLCG), which is attended by TfL officers and local transport campaigners (including Disability Action Waltham Forest). In 2008 the Council will set up a local Mobility Forum as a sub group of TLCG.

Support disability equality in schools by ensuring that schools have produced their Disability Equality Schemes and to support them in delivering their action plans

To help primary schools develop their disability equality schemes Edu-Action (the company the Council contract with support schools) provided support and guidance to head teachers at a conference in May 2007. This was provided alongside national guidance and will help schools prepare their schemes by the December 2007 deadline. In addition Edu-Action have started a

discussion to explore ways of promoting disability equality in schools and in their own company. More will be reported on this work as it develops.

An equality impact assessment is undertaken on all new or amended policies, including Human Resources (HR) policies, introduced and implemented by Edu-Action. As part of the Council's campaign to encourage more disabled people to become school governors the Council will actively work with schools to identify where reasonable adjustments can be made where this is required.

PRIORITY 2 - Getting your voice heard

It was also decided that disabled people wanted the Council to take steps to:

Keep disabled people informed about progress on the Disability Equality Scheme and to involve them in its delivery where possible

This is the Council's first progress report, which is being published to mark the International Day of Disabled People. The Diversity Team will be working with Disability Action Waltham Forest (DAWF) to circulate information about the work they have completed in their newsletter and plan to provide feedback sessions on their progress to disabled people in February and March 2008.

Make the Council's complaints procedure easier and reassure the public that they genuinely welcome complaints

Waltham Forest Council is continuously improving this procedure. The Council has refreshed their complaints poster, which DAWF have displayed at the Disability Resource Centre to reassure its disabled users that complaints are welcomed. DAWF have also mailed out the new posters with its regular newsletters. The Diversity Team are planning to pick up feedback at sessions planned to run in February and March 2008. The complaints poster is available in the Council's public reception points.

Encourage more disabled people to get involved in consultations and community meetings

In September 2007 information about the Council's current plan of open consultation and engagement was sent to DAWF who promoted it to disabled people in the Borough via their newsletter. The Council continue to use accessible venues for community meetings and monitor participation by disabled people. Since June 2007, 27 per cent of attendees at Community Councils identified themselves as being a disabled person. This is very positive as the overall number of disabled people in the population is 16.5 per cent. To further encourage involvement in the Council's consultations the Council will be providing Council officers with a 'How to' guide on providing inclusive and accessible engagement work to develop, this will start in February 2008.

Encourage more disabled people to be school governors

Recruitment of disabled people to become school governors is a regular and constant feature in the Council's drive to recruit school governors. The Council is developing a strategy to focus on advertising in publications targeted towards a readership of disabled people. An article in WFM is planned to promote the benefits of being a school governor to disabled people. DAWF will also help to increase awareness.

PRIORITY 3 - Living independently

Disabled people also wanted the Council to take steps to:

Make local housing more accessible

To improve monitoring of disabled tenants and survey satisfaction levels with repairs, aids and adaptations

By working with tenants Ascham Homes has successfully obtained information from 90 per cent of tenants about whether or not they have a disability. This is a significant step forward. The proportion of tenants for who the Council hold information on disability has increased over the last year, partly due to prize competitions and using annual gas visits to distribute questionnaires. Nearly a quarter (23.4 per cent) of customers state that they have a disability. The Council is now asking customers whether there is anything they should know about them, which will impact on the Council's ability to deliver a good service. The Council is developing a series of flags on their IT system that will alert staff to a disabled customer's specific requirements so that their service experience is enhanced (for example, visitors are advised to 'knock and wait' where a customer has hearing and or mobility problems).

Survey results from 2005 and 2006 showed that tenants were dissatisfied with the repairs service. To improve it a review was completed which explained more fully why tenants were dissatisfied. Key issues generally were repair response times, customer care and the need for more accurate recording of the repair issue. Ascham Homes is developing a service improvement plan to address these issues, which will be implemented in the new year. The review report also included details of the changes Ascham Homes would make to improve the service. These changes are now being implemented and they include better communication with customers about the status of a repair job and a new complaints process.

To develop new strategies to improve the involvement of disabled tenants in the management of their estates

The "tenants compact" sets out how the Council and Ascham Homes will, in partnership with the Tenants Groups, involve individual residents in the delivery and continuous improvement of its housing services. Ascham Homes is currently reviewing the compact

and this focuses mainly on developing informal involvement with a range of people including disabled tenants and on improving the interest in and coverage of tenants and residents associations. More will be reported on this as it develops.

The consultation stages of the review will be complete by the end of January 2008. This should enable management to redraft the compact and put on place any operational changes and new structures some time early in the new year. A number of options for widening participation and involvement are now being considered, and the equalities impact of each will be a central focus of the consultation exercise. Positive action is being taken to ensure that the consultation group itself reflects the community, with disabled people properly represented. Through our Tenant Information Network the Council is able to approach those disabled people who have specifically expressed an interest in being consulted on such issues and using the Council's diversity profile will also invite disabled people who have not previously been heard from.

To develop effective policy and procedures to deal with the perpetrators of harassment of disabled tenants, so that they do not have to move from their property

Ascham Homes has developed an Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) strategy to deal with people who harass disabled tenants. They have also implemented updated procedures, which make it easier and more effective for victims to report anti social behaviour and for the council to take action according to policy. The Anti social behaviour hotline is in place (020 8496 4011, from 9am to 10pm). Out of hours cover is provided through Waltham Forest Direct.

Provide training to planning and building control staff and guidance material on inclusive design, ensuring that accessibility is designed into all new housing developments at the planning stage

The Development Control department has a designated Access Officer in place who provides guidance and advice to staff on inclusive design and accessibility.

The allocations and choice based letting process system are reviewed to consider the feasibility of fully integrating wheelchair standard housing and level access/lifetime homes properties into the system, whilst ensuring they are ring fenced for applicants to require this kind of property for disability related reasons

The allocation and choice based letting policy was reviewed and a new scheme implemented in May 2007. By adopting the "London Housing Strategy" the Council is committed to building all new homes to Lifetime Homes Standards and for 10 per cent to be wheelchair accessible.

Encourage disabled people to take up direct payments

A local target of 250 people taking up direct payments by March 2008 has been set. Actions to improve the uptake of direct payments include building capacity in the Direct Payments Support Service (increasing funding); Direct Payments Support Service holding surgeries at main assessment and care management frontline teams; the recruitment of a Direct Payments Co-ordinator (who will start in January 2008); information leaflets updated and distributed; and training programme in planning stages.

Promote positive images of disabled people in our publications and improve the accessibility of the Council's website

Waltham Forest Council's editorial policy, which covers WFM, includes the use of positive images of disabled people. Information from the residents survey was used on the Council's review of WFM Magazine to ensure it promotes positive images of disabled people. In addition the Council has developed a new corporate style guide that will ensure all new Council publications are compliant. This will be formally introduced in the new year.

The Council's website is now disability compliant, the new site will be launched in 2007. Local disabled people were involved in testing the new website before it was launched. The Council are on target to review all Council's Standard Service Leaflets by March 2007. Also the new Corporate Style Guide will make sure all new Council publications are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Train our staff to increase their awareness of disability issues including deaf awareness

So far 52 Council officers have completed “understanding disability” courses. In May 2007 the Council, in partnership with the Disability Resource Centre held an open day for staff and organised deaf awareness sessions. In addition, during 2006/7 149 adult and community services staff completed training on a range of conditions and impairments including diabetes, dementia and visual impairments. A further 175 have been briefed on the Mental Capacity legislation. Further disability awareness training is planned to start in April 2008, this will be mandatory for 1600 staff in the adult and community service directorate.

To arrange a one-off meeting with existing signers to identify best practice, ways to recruit and increase the availability of signers, improve liaison between signers and ensure that service users/clients are aware of the council’s complaints procedure. As part of this exercise to examine the translation and interpretation arrangements developed by Newham Council.

The Council continues to sponsor staff who wish to become signers to level 1 and 2. This is on a voluntary basis only and not a requirement for employment. The meeting has not gone ahead due to budget restrictions. In addition the Council has identified that it needs to establish its exact requirements for interpreters before exploring issues of recruitment, liaison and good practice being delivered elsewhere. This review will take place in 2008 and an action plan developed to improve our service to deaf customers.

Increase the number of disabled people working for the Council, to make sure they have supportive managers and work in a suitable environment

The number of disabled people working for the Council has increased from 116 in March 2006 to 155 in March 2007. The Council will publish the March 2008 figures in the next report.

The Council is continuing to work closely with a network of disabled staff to further improve the suitability of the work environment and the supportiveness of their managers. The Council is also a member of the “Employers Forum on Disability” and managers can obtain best practice advice from the forum on managing disabled staff. During the last year the Council’s human resources and network members have organised a staff conference for disabled staff, launched a disability handbook for managers, promoted a mentoring scheme for disabled staff and have worked with IT colleagues to help disabled people get the computers and other

technical equipment they need as soon as possible. The Council will also be re-launching their anti-harassment/bullying policy early in 2008.

Develop a plan for involving disabled children and young people in improving the specialist children's service

The plan has been created. Its implementation period is from October 2007 to March 2008. Its key priority is to involve disabled children and young people in service improvement within the Specialist Children's Service.

Put clear and tactile markers on recycling and refuse bins

A supplier of tactile markers (raised labels) has been identified. The Council has identified an officer to lead on trialling the markers. By March 2008 the Council will have agreed the practicalities of the trial and will be planning to fully implement the new arrangements during 2008/09.

Encourage more disabled people to take part in fitness initiatives and sports

Reduced barriers to increase participation in leisure, recreation and physical activity.

The Council's property services department have begun to audit their leisure centres to establish their level of accessibility for disabled people. The Council has introduced "disability impact assessment" arrangements to make sure that disability access issues are designed into any plans for new buildings. The contracts that the Council has with organisations to provide leisure services in the future will include a requirement to tell the Council about any complaints from disabled people and how many disabled people use the services.

Provide improved marketing and communication of information in terms of accessibility and positive images of disabled people

GLL, who run the Council's leisure centres, have improved their marketing information to include leisure guides, which are now available in Braille, audio, large print, typetalk. GLL have also upgraded their website to improve access for disabled people.

Provide training to ensure that leisure and sports staff and GLL staff are disability confident and able to provide high standards of customer care to disabled customers

The team have either received training or are scheduled to receive training. EDFS are providing tutor training to GLL employees in October, this will allow all GLL employees to receive on-going training on disability issues.

Ensure disabled people's voices are heard where decision on sports and leisure are being taken and feel that they are able to influence the decisions

Following extensive consultation with disabled people, the Council has drafted a "Disability Sports and Physical Activity Action Plan". The Council is now in the process of working out how much it will cost to implement the plan and when implementation can start. The Council will report more on this as the work develops.

To encourage and support more disabled people to participate in training and in internet related training in particular

The Diversity Team have received a draft action plan from ClaSS explaining the steps that will be taken up to July 2007 to encourage and support more disabled people to participate in training. The Council will be working with ClaSS to develop their September 2008 plan and will focus on how internet related training can be produced.