

## **Chapter Four**

# **Disability Equality Scheme**

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## **1. Background**

The development of a Wealden Disability Equality Scheme has provided an opportunity to assess how effective and responsive our policies and services are for disabled people. The aim of this scheme is to promote equality for disabled people and sets out how the Council will strive to achieve this.

The Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity for all individuals and communities in Wealden and this Disability Equality Scheme builds upon the equality principles and values set out in the Wealden Equality Scheme and should be read alongside this.

### **1.1 The Disability Equality Duty**

As a District Council responsible for delivering services to the people who live, work in, and visit Wealden, we are committed to meeting our statutory responsibility within the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 has been amended by the DDA 2005, so that it now places a duty on all public authorities when carrying out their functions, to have due regard 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

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

The totality of this duty is referred to as the 'disability equality duty', or the 'general duty'. The overarching goal of the general duty is to promote equality of opportunity, and the other elements of the duty will both support this goal and require due regard in their own right.

'Due regard' means that in all our decisions and functions the Council should give weight to the need to promote disability equality in proportion to its

relevance. It will not always be possible for the Council to adopt the course of action which will best promote disability equality, but we must ensure we have due regard in relation to other requirements.

In addition to this general duty, the Act also sets out the specific duties Wealden District Council must fulfil. These include:

- Preparation and publication of a Disability Equality Scheme
- Implementation of this scheme through an action plan and
- An annual progress report.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) suggest that the concept 'social model of disability' represents the key to understanding and implementing the Disability Equality Duty, the aim of which is to understand and dismantle the barriers which exclude and limit the life chances of disabled people.

The Council's work to promote disability equality aims to reflect the social model of disability and recognises that the problems associated with disability can result from social structures and attitudes, rather than from a person's impairment or medical condition.

## **1.2 The Wealden Equality Scheme**

The Council aims to ensure that all our services and employment opportunities are provided with equity and fairness to everyone. This will be achieved through the following priority objectives (specific actions are detailed in the Service Delivery and Employment Action Plan):

- Promoting equality of opportunity and good race relations for all individuals and communities in Wealden.
- Collecting data and information on the impact of our policies and practices.
- Eliminating any unlawful discrimination or harassment in the provision of our services and employment.
- Improving the accessibility of our services and employment opportunities for all and tackling the causes of social exclusion; and
- Ensuring effective implementation of equality duties across all service areas.

This chapter identifies issues that we will be working on over the next three years to achieve equality for disabled people and have be incorporated into the Service Delivery and Employment Action Plan of the Wealden Equality Scheme.

The issues identified come from evidence collated between partner local authorities, a mapping exercise of current service provision for disabled people, and the involvement of disabled people living in the district.

Included in our Service Delivery Action Plan is the arrangement to continue to involve disabled people in identifying issues, publicising the results and the steps we will take to remedy our practices and monitor our progress.

### **1.3 National and local statistics**

In mid-2005 the population of Wealden District stood at 141,043 according to the Office of National Statistics. The Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS) of August 2005 shows 3,730 people within Wealden were claiming Disability Living Allowance<sup>1</sup>.

The Census of 2001 gave us a clearer picture of where Wealden stood at that time. It concluded that 23,514 people within the district were considered to have a limiting long-term illness<sup>2</sup>. The Census also indicated that 30.99% of Wealden households contained one or more persons with a limiting long-term illness and classed 3,082 persons as economically inactive due to being permanently sick/disabled.

The Disability Rights Commission suggest that 1 in 7 people in Britain are disabled<sup>3</sup>.

This evidence shows the need to duly consider disabled people within the District, their specific needs, attitudes towards them, and their ability to access services or employment with the Council as easily as those who do not have impairments.

## **2 Involving disabled people**

The Disability Rights Commission conveys the message from disabled people that policymakers should do 'nothing about us without us'.<sup>4</sup>

Wealden District Council recognised disabled people as key stakeholders in the development of our Disability Equality Scheme. It was acknowledged that we would be unable to effectively identify barriers faced by disabled people, find out about unsatisfactory outcomes or set priorities for the action plan without asking disabled people about their views and experiences.

### **2.1 Partnership working**

In July 2006 several officers from the Council attended a disability conference organised by East Sussex Disability Association (ESDA). Following this event a charter of engagement was developed based on how disabled people would like to be included in the development of disability equality schemes. This charter was used to inform the development of the Wealden Disability Equality Scheme and our methods of involvement.

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<sup>1</sup> Disability Living Allowance is paid to people who become disabled before the age of 65 and who need assistance with person care and/or mobility. Once awarded DLA will continue to be paid as long as the conditions of entitlement are met and consequently some claimants will be over pension age.

<sup>2</sup> This was a self assessment of whether or not a person has a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities or the work they do, including problems that are due to old age.

<sup>3</sup> Disability Rights Commission- Disability Equality: Making it happen. First Review of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Disability Rights Commission: 'Guidance for public authorities on how to effectively involve disabled people'.

In developing our Disability Equality Scheme we met with colleagues in neighbouring councils to discuss where involvement of disabled people had recently taken place. Where appropriate, some of the key points raised in these consultations have been incorporated in our action plan.

We also undertook a mapping exercise, which helped us to look at the extent to which our services and other functions take into account the needs of disabled people. This has highlighted where there is already provision as well as areas where we need to make improvements, and this has been used in the development of our scheme.

Wealden District Council was also one of forty organisations who participated in Eastbourne Borough Council's engagement event for disabled people. This event enabled disabled people to raise issues particularly affecting their lives in Eastbourne and then sought to list possible solutions to these issues. Wealden acknowledged that many residents who live in southern Wealden may use services in Eastbourne. This event and the feedback report have provided information on the views and experiences of disabled people in Eastbourne, and where relevant these have been incorporated in the development of our action plan.

## **2.2 The Wealden Survey**

Wealden District Council also wanted to understand the views and experiences of disabled people who live in Wealden and their experience of contacting or accessing a service from us. We contacted East Sussex Disability Association<sup>5</sup> (ESDA) to help us involve disabled people and in partnership drafted a questionnaire to find out about the experiences of disabled people who live in the area served by Wealden District Council.

We wanted to use methods of engagement which were accessible to disabled people and sought to achieve this through a number of ways. The questionnaire was made available on the Council's website and tested by a consultant who is disabled.

It was acknowledged that internet technology can be a good way of involving disabled people who have mobility difficulties or people who do not wish to identify themselves as disabled. Although, as with the community at large, not all disabled people may have use of the internet.

As such the questionnaire was also made available in alternative formats, large print, audio tape and CD, and Braille. Provision was also made for one of ESDA's researchers to complete the questionnaire with a respondent over the phone or face-to-face, if requested.

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<sup>5</sup> ESDA is a registered charity where the majority of trustees and members are disabled people. A number of staff and volunteers, many of whom are disabled people, are also employed to run projects and services. ESDA exists to help all disabled people in East Sussex achieve independence and control over their lives.

It was made clear to respondents of the questionnaire that all information provided was strictly confidential to two disabled researchers working for ESDA. It was felt necessary to highlight this to encourage participation and maintain respondents' confidence in the process. It was also hoped that by working with ESDA, disabled people may feel more inclined to discuss any issues regarding the Council.

The questionnaire was posted on the Council's website and promoted on the home page. A media release was also issued to explain what we were doing and our aims.

The Council sent a hard copy of the questionnaire and a covering letter to around 2,800 Wealden District Council service users. This invitation to participate in the survey was sent to households who have an assisted refuse and/or recycling collection service. Assisted collection does not assume disability, but where residents considered themselves to be disabled they were invited to participate. ESDA also sent a letter and a copy of the questionnaire to their members who live in the Wealden area and similarly invited them to participate.

Following the closing date of the questionnaire a focus group and 11 one-to-one interviews were set up by ESDA, for respondents who had indicated that they would be willing to take part in further research. The interviews and focus group session aimed to discover, in more detail, the reasons behind the responses to the questionnaire. This qualitative research was designed to provide case studies and gain greater detail as to the experiences disabled people have faced, their views and suggested ways for us to make improvements. Personal assistants and sign language interpreters were made available and transport costs were also paid to those who participated.

We also asked respondents if they would be willing to take part in a future reference group. It is intended that this group will be used to assist with future planning activity and the monitoring of this Disability Equality Scheme.

A number of Councillors and staff who consider themselves to be disabled have also been contacted to highlight the scheme's development. We will seek to involve our disabled Councillors and staff further through the course of the three year scheme.

We hoped that the above methods would create a picture of the current barriers to accessing the Council's services and information, and priorities for action from disabled people. Set alongside the Council's wider Objectives this would inform the development of the action plan.

### **2.3 Assessment of the methods used**

Our response rate was surprisingly high, a total of 438 people submitted questionnaires, which was a response rate of 14%. We would like to record our thanks to ESDA, who managed this large response rate and provided us with a very detailed report of results.

When assessing the make-up of respondents it became clear that half of the respondents to this survey were of pensionable age. In assessing the data we have therefore acknowledged that this may have affected some outcomes of this report. Respondents also indicated that they had the same ethnic background (White UK, 3 White European) although not all respondents answered this question. This profile is largely representative of Wealden's population, which comprises more people aged over 50 than under 20 years, and a large majority are from the same ethnic background (White, 98.3%)<sup>6</sup>.

This should also be seen in the context of the national picture. The Department of Work and Pensions Family Resources Survey UK 2004-05, which is a key source of information on the adult and child disabled population, shows that from the sample of private households in the UK (excluding information on individuals in retirement or nursing homes) the percentage of all individuals who have a disability, including a long standing illness increased with age:

Source: Department of Work and Pensions Family Resources Survey UK 2004-05<sup>7</sup>

Age	% of individuals with a disability
25 to 34	8 %
35 to 44	12%
45 to 54	19%
55 to 59	26%
60 to 64	33%
65 to 74	39%
75 to 84	53%
85 or over	69%

It must then be acknowledged that the age group of respondents may mean that some of the issues that are perhaps more pertinent to younger people may not have been highlighted.

The results also indicate that the responses received were from people with a range of impairments and some respondents had more than one. However some impairments were not sufficiently well represented and these include people with learning difficulties, D/deaf<sup>8</sup> people and those with mental health problems.

<sup>6</sup> Census 2001, National Statistics. Available at <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>

<sup>7</sup> Department of Work and Pensions *Family Resources Survey*  
Available at: [http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/frs/2004\\_05/pdfonly/frs\\_2004\\_05\\_report.pdf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/frs/2004_05/pdfonly/frs_2004_05_report.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> D/deaf: 'Deaf' with a capital D is used when it refers to Deaf people who use sign language as their first or preferred language. Deaf people identify themselves as part of a cultural and linguistic community. Their culture is linked to sign language, lifestyle, history, and a sense of belonging. The Deaf community includes Deaf people with visual impairment as well as Deaf people with additional disabilities, minimal language skills and Deaf people who use foreign sign languages. The term 'deaf people' (with lower case d) is used as a general term to refer to people with all degrees of deafness, including deafened, hard of hearing and Deaf people. Source: Guidance on providing BSL/ English interpreters under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. British Deaf Association, Disability Rights Commission, RNID for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Consequently the results do indicate a number of gaps in reaching certain groups of disabled people, including different age groups and different impairment types. We have been mindful of the groups that may not have been reached when developing this scheme and acknowledge where we may improve involvement activity in the future.

We have yet to determine whether other local public authorities had similar difficulties in involving some groups of disabled people. We will look to work with our counterparts in the future and see where a joined-up approach may help to reach these groups.

Having acknowledged this, we feel that our involvement of disabled people has been extremely valuable and provided a good basis to develop this scheme.

#### **2.4 The key findings**

It is clear that respondents felt that by seeking the views of disabled people, Wealden District Council recognise the importance of listening to what disabled people say and incorporating this into policymaking and practices.

The research indicated that for a significant number of people their experience of Wealden District Council was positive.

Of those who answered the respective questions:

- 91% said that their experience of the service received from Wealden District Council (WDC) was excellent, very good or good.
- 92% said that they feel they would have the same chances in accessing WDC's services as anybody else.
- 76% said that they felt that the services provided by WDC take account of the needs of disabled people.
- 85% said that WDC is either excellent, very good or good at promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.
- 77% who had contacted the Council said that adjustments had been made to take into account their impairment.
- 83% said that the adjustments were helpful/appropriate.

However areas of improvement were also identified and these are reflected in the recommendations put forward by ESDA (Appendix 7.1) and have been taken into account in the action plan.

### **3. The extent to which we achieve disability equality**

The Wealden Equality Scheme Service Delivery Action Plan includes key actions which the Council will undertake to promote disability equality over the three year period of the scheme.

The involvement of disabled people and consideration of existing research has identified and informed the key actions for this plan. It is acknowledged

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that this is the first action plan and, as such, many of the actions are to plan new mechanisms for gathering evidence on the Council's performance in relation to disability equality. Further outcomes are expected to flow from these and we will be able to develop clearer measures of success.

Six key areas have been identified through the involvement of disabled people. They can be put into the broad categories of:

- Engaging with disabled people;
- Attitudes;
- Communication and information;
- Accessibility;
- Service delivery: policies and procedures and;
- Employment.

These categories are ordered to broadly reflect the priorities of disabled people as identified in this process.

Set in the context of what disabled people have told us, this section will outline what the Council is currently doing against these priorities and what we intend to do (as set out in greater detail in the Service Delivery and Employment Action Plans).

### 3.1 Identified themes

#### 1. Engaging with disabled people

There was a strong feeling from the respondents that by consulting with disabled people through this questionnaire, it showed that we were providing an opportunity for people to air their views and initiate change. Some respondents indicated that we should maintain dialogue with Wealden residents and that consultation should be evident in the planning of services and buildings to ensure safety and accessibility for all.

Disabled people said:

<p><i>"I think that Wealden, along with other local authorities, should be more aware of the needs of their disabled residents when it comes to planning... making sure when pavements are dug up, that the correct safety access has been put into place".</i></p> <p><i>"When a new building project is given permission, more thought needs to be given to what impact the disruption will have on those who find it difficult to walk, see or hear".</i></p>	<p>A survey of disabled residents concerning the services delivered by Wealden District Council. Report by East Sussex Disability Association.</p>
<p><i>'Planning committees should ask disabled people their views before saying yes'.</i></p> <p><i>'Decision makers should always consider the consequences for disabled people when they agree cuts or efficiency savings- all decision makers should have awareness training and the whole process should be transparent. If</i></p>	<p>Eastbourne Borough Council's Engagement Event.</p>

<p><i>held to task over decisions they should stand up and explain the reasons to disabled people’.</i></p> <p><i>‘Decision makers should consult with groups who will be most affected before making decisions at all, this aids transparency’.</i></p>	
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As such, we recognise the importance of sharing what we have learned from the survey with the people who took part in the process and to the wider community. The executive summary will be published on the website and made available in a range of formats. The scheme will also be sent to respondents who indicated they would like a copy.

Within the Consultation Strategy, we will look to establish what we can do to encourage and make it easier for disabled people to comment on surveys, take part in consultation activity, use the complaints procedure, or generally become involved in the democratic process. The research has shown us that it is necessary to engage with disabled people in a variety of ways. This may require the development of relationships with generic disability organisations and/or to use free newspapers/ community magazines to a greater extent.

Within the survey we asked respondents to volunteer to be part of an on-going reference group. We will seek to establish this group in order to help us monitor the progress of our scheme and review our policies and practices. It is important to us that the links made with disabled people are maintained and developed during the course of this scheme.

Wealden District Council has a People’s Panel which is used to consult on a range of subject areas and provides an opportunity to seek the views from the wider community. This panel is currently in the process of being updated, and during this process we will seek to update the data we have on whether members have a disability, and encourage disabled people to become members.

We will also investigate the re-establishment of an Access Group to create opportunities to listen to the views of disabled people. There are examples where services have, or are currently seeking the views of disabled persons to inform the provision of the service. For instance the Electoral Services department followed a complaint about a polling station venue, by inviting the complainant to assist with a review of that station. The e-government service currently works with a disabled person to help ensure the Wealden website is accessible. Through the methods detailed above, we hope we can create a dialogue with disabled people to help our service delivery.

Over the course of the scheme we will look to work with other public authorities to engage certain groups of disabled people that we were not able to reach through this initial involvement activity. This will include people who have mental health issues and/or learning difficulties and communication

impairments. We will also look to carry out further work with younger disabled people within the district to ensure that their needs are also being met.

## 2. Attitudes

A main priority agreed by participants of the focus group was that Wealden District Council should provide training for its staff in disability equality issues, particularly in order to improve attitudes towards disabled people and to raise awareness of the barriers faced by them. It should be highlighted that many respondents felt that the majority of Council staff were positive, friendly and helpful and treated people with respect. There were however some examples given by respondents, where in their view the Council had not treated them fairly and appropriately. This does not mean that it always happens, but we must consider these findings and the corresponding recommendations.

Disabled people said:

<p><i>"I find if there is a problem with the flat, or anything to do with my disability... or my benefits, I find Wealden Council to be very helpful"</i></p> <p>Lack of deaf awareness by Council employees on the phone and at reception points: <i>"I can't talk over the phone as I'm hard of hearing and need to look at who I am talking to. A couple of times the person behind the desk doesn't understand and has a bad attitude to me"</i></p>	<p>A survey of disabled residents concerning the services delivered by Wealden District Council. Report by East Sussex Disability Association.</p>
<p><i>'People need to take more time to understand and learn about disability'.</i></p> <p><i>'People need to be more informed'.</i></p> <p><i>'Not enough 'can do' attitudes. This is what we need'.</i></p> <p><i>'Be aware of differences and the diverse range of disabilities'.</i></p> <p><i>'More emphasis on training and awareness for the hidden disabilities would help change attitudes'.</i></p> <p><i>'Need positive reaction to reasonable adjustments'.</i></p>	<p><b>Eastbourne Borough Council's Engagement Event.</b></p>

A number of general equality training courses took place last year and two specific disability awareness courses. Within the action plan we will seek to ensure that staff at all levels receive disability equality training, and the priority will be for reception and front line staff. In addition staff at all levels will receive information and guidance on disability equality issues from their relevant Head of Service following the publication of the Wealden Disability Equality Scheme.

Within our customer service aims we will set out a standard process for finding out the individual access needs of a customer. Many service areas currently enquire as to whether service users visiting the council offices or taking part in a Wealden event have any access requirements. Within the Service Delivery Action Plan we will seek to standardise this process and embed it, so that for example forms are offered in large print rather than the customer having to ask.

Wealden District Council has a Bullying and Harassment policy and we will ensure that this is updated to include a reference to the Disability Equality Duty.

### 3. Communication

Ensuring that information is accessible was of particular concern to many respondents. It was also suggested that the Council should give more information on how to obtain information in different formats.

Disabled people said:

<p><i>"Use of more pictures and simple text as (instead of) long words"</i></p> <p><i>"Publications available in different languages and formats"</i></p> <p><i>"...information in large print"</i></p>	<p>A survey of disabled residents concerning the services delivered by Wealden District Council. Report by East Sussex Disability Association.</p>
<p><i>'More communication on services available please'.</i></p> <p><i>'Insufficient information about ESCC registered disabled card- communication issues. Where do you get it? Some people do not know this exists and this card helps you get a bus pass'.</i></p> <p><i>'More leaflets on services available please'.</i></p> <p><i>'You need to join an organisation if you want to find out about things and you may not want to. Put things in the local paper'.</i></p> <p><i>'Agencies need to share information more and improve across sectors- everyone has a job to do and doesn't think about other issues, if they did things would improve'.</i></p>	<p>Eastbourne Borough Council's Engagement Event.</p>

There are currently a range of ways to contact the Council which includes voice telephone, Minicom, email and fax. These methods are advertised on all letters, compliment slips, publications and the website. The survey results highlight the need to better advertise these ways of contacting the Council and how we provide accessible services. Within the Council's work on Communication we will seek to identify methods to better promote ways of contacting the Council and look to integrate information on the accessibility of local services into existing information sources.

In accordance with the Wealden Complaints Procedure, a complaint can be made over the phone on a dedicated line, by email and/or letter, or in person at the Council offices. The survey indicated the need to highlight how complaints can be made and we will look at ways to better promote the complaints procedure more effectively.

Many of the Council's services provide key documents in large print, audio and Braille upon request. Within the Communication Strategy we will seek to standardise a policy for such provision and assess the most appropriate way of informing the community that this service is available.

Wealden District Council is part of the East Sussex Translation and Interpreting Partnership, which has procured a county-wide contract for language translation and interpreting services. In 2007 it is expected that this partnership will look to jointly procure a contract for British Sign Language and non-verbal communication support to be available to disabled people. The aim of this county-wide partnership has been to contract a service with common objectives and standards to benefit service users. This joint working will enable the Council to standardise an approach to this service provision.

We aim to ensure that our Council publications are designed to be accessible to all, by making them easy to read, and by using plain English. By providing guidance to internal authors and designers within the Communications Strategy, we will seek to ensure that Council publications are accessible for people with a range of disabilities. Through our work on communications we will also look to see how the Council may better promote positive images of disabled people.

The Wealden website is graded at Level A (World Wide Web Consortium) for its accessibility and the Wealden youth website has been tested by a consultant who is disabled. We will continue to seek to improve the accessibility of the Wealden District Council website as part of an ongoing project.

Wealden District Council is a partner in the East Sussex Equality Co-ordinators group, which meet to share information and best practice regarding the equality and diversity agenda. Wealden will continue to work within this group and seek to look at how the partner authorities may jointly improve the way in which we communicate and distribute information to disabled people.

#### **4. Accessibility**

Respondents of the Wealden survey highlighted a number of access issues within the district and request a number of improvements to be made. These include lack of accessible transport and parking.

Disabled people said:

<p><i>“Make it possible for all residents of Wealden District to get out into the community, not just the privileged few!”</i></p> <p><i>“Unless I can park near my destination, I cannot go out”</i></p> <p><i>“Without transport no services can be accessed!!”</i></p>	<p>A survey of disabled residents concerning the services delivered by Wealden District Council. Report by East Sussex Disability Association.</p>
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Wealden District Council has ‘access audited’ all of its buildings and improvements have been carried out where recommended. Where further adjustments are identified we will seek to ensure that the council buildings are accessible for both our customers and employees. We will also look to promote the accessible facilities we have, so that the community is aware of our provisions.

It is the case that not all of the improvements identified by disabled people with regard to accessibility are directly within the Council’s remit. Where specific recommendations have been made which are outside of the responsibility of the District Council we will pass on this information to the relevant organisation/s. We will also seek to work with others to generally improve access and transport in the community, as identified in the survey, through the Wealden Local Strategic Partnership and other means.

In partnership with other organisations, we will look to make it easier for disabled people to plan their journey and create a map of accessible public toilets and car parking, which will be disseminated.

### **5. Service delivery**

Many of Wealden District Council’s service areas have provisions in place to take account of the needs of disabled people, some of which have not been detailed within this scheme.

In the executive summary report from ESDA (Appendix 7.1) a number of specific comments were made with regard to service areas that the respondents had contacted and a number of the recommendations for improvements have been included within the Service Delivery Action Plan.

As outlined in the Service Delivery Action Plan, we will look to standardise the provisions made for disabled people across our services. We will also seek to improve opportunities for disabled people to access Council services in an appropriate way- guided by the results of the ongoing involvement of disabled people and linked with our customer service (Charter Mark) literature.

Through Equality Impact Assessments and the monitoring of services and policies throughout the three-year period of the scheme will seek to ensure that provisions are made for disabled people within our services. The Council’s Equality Impact Assessment process is detailed in Chapter Ten of the Wealden Equality Scheme.

We hope that the above will seek to ensure that, within the Council's service delivery, disability equality is mainstreamed.

## 6. Employment

Respondents felt that the Council should encourage more disabled people to work for the Council and that disabled Council employees may have a greater understanding about the needs of disabled members of the public using their services. It was also suggested by some respondents that by employing disabled people in customer-facing and frontline staffing roles, the Council would be demonstrating a positive, inclusive approach.

Disabled people said:

<p>When respondents were asked if they would ever consider applying to work for Wealden District Council, of those who answered, 91% said 'no'. The main reason for this was identified as due to their age and being retired. However some respondents felt that their impairment would have a negative effect on a job application:</p> <p><i>"My disability would be a disadvantage".</i></p> <p><i>"Not able to work unsupported".</i></p> <p><i>"My impairment is such that I am not considered employable".</i></p>	<p><b>A survey of disabled residents concerning the services delivered by Wealden District Council. Report by East Sussex Disability Association.</b></p>
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There are a number of policies and practices that the Council currently undertakes to promote equality for disabled people in relation to recruitment, development and retention of employees. Some examples of this include:

- Recruitment advertisements are placed in the customer service areas of the council offices to improve access to jobs from all sectors of the community.
- Work experience placements are provided for disabled people. Their feedback can help to make the workplace more accessible and user friendly for disabled people which may also encourage disabled people to consider working for the Council.
- Areas of the Council have been made physically more accessible for disabled candidates and employees through the introduction of induction loops in interview rooms, lower reception desks and additional ramps.
- Some disability/equality awareness training for staff took place last year and staff involved with recruitment were invited to attend equality awareness training.

- Wealden's employment application form was reviewed by a disabled volunteer and changes were made to make the website application form more accessible to people with impaired sight. Other formats are also made available by request. This is in line with the workforce development strategy - to deliver services in different ways to different people.
- A question is asked on the employment application form; whether any assistance may be given at interview.
- Aptitude tests have been checked to meet equality requirements.
- During interviews a question on equality awareness is always asked to check candidates' understanding of equality and how it affects their role.
- Steps are taken to ensure that when employees have been identified as disabled, reasonable adjustments, which they need to carry out their job, have been provided.
- Increased access to flexible and home working can particularly benefit some disabled employees and is currently being assessed at Wealden.
- A diversity employment event was held in partnership with Jobcentre Plus in October 2005 in Uckfield town centre, which aimed to promote employment to all sectors of the community. This event helped to raise the Councils' profile as an employer of disabled people and a disabled work experience placement was secured as a result of this.
- A section on equality is included in all staff job descriptions.

The Council is committed to the Disability Symbol- 'Positive About Disabled People', but it is important for us to build upon the work already in place to seek to increase the recruitment and retention of disabled employees in Wealden. This may be achieved through: advertising employment positions in disability organisations; looking at how disabled people can be supported better through the recruitment process; posting more information on the website, within the application pack and at interview about access and equality of opportunity for employees and, by promoting the work placement offers for disabled people.

We will also seek to ensure that managers and employees on interview panels are trained in the importance and practicalities of making 'reasonable adjustments'.

We will seek to engage disabled employees of the Council through a number of methods (described in further detail later in the scheme) to identify any barriers in employment and possible solutions.

## **4. Gathering information**

The Council acknowledges that to effectively monitor the progress of this scheme in meeting the general duty we must set out arrangements for gathering information on the extent to which our services, and other functions, take account of the needs of disabled persons. This information will then help the Council make decisions about what actions would best improve disability equality in the future and help us prepare subsequent schemes.

### **4.1 The effect of the Council's policies and practices on the recruitment, development and retention of its disabled employees**

Wealden District Council is required to establish information-gathering systems in relation to recruitment, development and retention of their disabled employees. This is to ensure that we can monitor the effect of these functions on disabled employees.

We have given a focus to disability in relation to employment since the adoption of the Wealden Equality Scheme in 2004. The Employment Action Plan describes the work to be undertaken in relation to employment on disability together with other areas of equality.

The Disability Equality Duty has given the Council an opportunity to re-assess the information gathering systems in place with regard to employment and assess the best way to adapt existing mechanisms to mainstream disability equality.

We currently collect information on the following and we will continue to do so through the duration of the scheme:

- Performance indicators place a responsibility on Wealden to provide statistics on the top 5% of earners who have a disability, the percentage of employees with a disability, and the percentage of economically active people with a disability.
- Wealden District Council is committed to the Disability Symbol- 'Positive About Disabled People'- to help to attract more disabled staff and create a more diverse workforce. The commitments Wealden has made by using this symbol are as follows:
  - To interview all applicants with a disability 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 we and they can do to make sure they can use and develop their abilities.
  - To make every effort when employees become disabled to help them stay in employment.
  - To take action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness needed to make our commitments work.

- To review the commitments and what has been achieved and plan ways to improve and let employees and the Employment Service know about future plans.

To meet these commitments, information is currently collected to show that all disabled candidates who meet the essential criteria for a job are interviewed and that all disabled employees have appraisals, are offered appropriate training and provided with reasonable adjustments to assist them with their employment. It is important that we continue to work towards improving our services in this area and the commitments are being met.

- We currently monitor all applications for jobs so we can gather and analyse information on the number of disabled candidates shortlisted and appointed, leavers (via exit interviews), and training attendees. We currently undertake exit interviews to find out why staff are leaving to see if our practices are working.
- In June 2005 we undertook a staff equality survey and the results were reported to the Wealden Employment Consultative Group in November 2005.

We will introduce and enhance a number of information gathering systems to monitor the Council's policies and practices regarding the recruitment, development and retention of its disabled employees during the three year scheme. These will include:

- Measuring the effects of our policies and working practices by asking staff and interview candidates for their views on our policies and practices. We will invite employees to comment on employment practices through the Employee Consultative Group/wealdnet/surveys/focus groups. This will include comments from staff on development/retention issues. We will survey disabled staff to assess what, if anything, impedes their progress or assists their working life. We will also seek to set up a staff equality focus group to identify improvements that may be made to the employment policies and practices.
- Disabled interviewees will be sent a survey after the recruitment process to establish how they found the experience and where they recommend any changes to policy or practice.
- Tracing the career development and training prospects of disabled staff within Wealden and compare these with non-disabled staff.
- Incorporating the new duty in training for all managers taking part in recruitment interviews. Staff will also be given disability awareness and equality training. The value of this training for staff will be measured through evaluation forms. This will be related to the experiences identified by disabled people.

- Providing more information about disability through the staff newsletter to raise awareness of the help that the Council, as an employer can provide. This may help to encourage staff to declare their disability and show that by doing so could help them.
- Statistics will be collected, analysed and reported on an annual basis for the Disability Equality Scheme to measure the outcomes of the employment process by disability as follows:
  - Number of candidates appointed, number shortlisted (new), training offered (new), promotion (new), grievances, disciplinary action, number of staff retained by providing reasonable adjustments (new), number of leavers, (differentials between disabled and non-disabled staff).

This information will be used to identify if there is discrimination occurring and identify measures to improve employment practices. Any problems identified through the above methods will be investigated and rectified. These actions are outlined in the Employment Action Plan.

#### **4.2 The extent to which the services that the Council provides, and those other functions it performs, takes into account the needs of disabled people**

Wealden District Council is required to establish information-gathering systems in relation to the services the Council provides, and those other functions it performs, to take account of the needs of disabled people. This is to ensure that we can monitor the effect of these functions on disabled people.

The current performance management framework seeks information relating to disabled people's particular experiences. These will continue to be collected and monitored with regard to the Disability Equality Duty. We will also look to ensure that service plans include measures of performance on equality and diversity.

In addition to this quantitative information, the Council will continue to collect qualitative measures to inform improvement activity, this will include:

- Staff surveys
- Customer surveys
- Feedback from staff network groups
- Analysis of complaints; and
- Research.

The Council will ensure that all customer surveys and evaluation forms ask general equality issues to include: age, disability, ethnicity and gender. This will enable us to assess the make-up of respondents, to help measure the use of our services by these groups and their views and satisfaction in service provision. Results will then be analysed to identify areas where there is a gap between the satisfaction of disabled people and non-disabled people so that

policies can be assessed to address these gaps. This requirement will be communicated across the organisation with an explanation as to why this information should be collected. It is acknowledged that staff will need to be effectively trained so they are aware of the reasons for collecting the data, and the use to which it will be put.

We will not seek to obtain impairment type data at this initial stage, rather concentrate on standardising the collection of data on customer surveys and feedback forms and review this at a later date.

The introduction of a Corporate and Service Charter will provide an opportunity to advertise what the customer can expect with regard to equality issues, these will include:

- We will provide services that are fair and accessible to all.
- We will make information available in a range of formats and languages upon request
- Arrange for translation or an interpreter when required.
- We will also provide a Minicom system and hearing loops in our public areas for people with hearing impairments.

We hope that the above measures will identify the range of barriers which disabled people face as well as measure successful outcomes. The evidence gathered by the above methods will inform whether our action plan and activities and functions are delivering greater equality for disabled people.

## **5 Implementing the scheme**

We aim to implement the actions identified to gather and use information to meet the duty to promote disability equality. These actions and objectives have been incorporated into the Service Delivery and Employment Action Plans.

On an annual basis we will publish a report containing a summary of the steps taken to fulfil the disability equality duty, the results of the information gathered in this time period, and what action we will take as a result. This will form part of an annual review on all equality work and will be reported to Members and published on the Council's website.

## **6 Concluding comments**

The aim of this Disability Equality Scheme is to identify and tackle discrimination, to prevent harassment, and to ensure that the Council's work promotes equality of opportunity between disabled people and other persons, in a way which reflects the 'social model of disability'.

The new mechanisms identified for gathering evidence in the action plans will inform the progress made, and from this we will develop clearer measures of success through the course of the scheme.

## **Appendices**

### **DES Appendix 7.1**

The Disability Equality Duty and Wealden District Council: A report on a project completed by East Sussex Disability Association for Wealden District Council- Executive Summary.

### **DES Appendix 7.2**

Eastbourne Borough Council's Disability Equality Scheme Engagement Event: Feedback Report.

