

Housing Executive Disability Action Plan 2020 - 2025

September 2020

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Please contact:

Tony Steed
Equality Unit
The Housing Centre
2 Adelaide Street
Belfast BT2 8PB

Tel: 02895 982 556

Textphone: 18001 034 4892 0900

Email: tony.steed@nihe.gov.uk

Website: www.nihe.gov.uk

Foreword

The Housing Executive is committed to challenging discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity for all staff, tenants and other customers. We recognise that we have an important role in serving an increasingly diverse society and in playing our part in promoting a cohesive society. This updated Disability Action Plan is part of our overarching equality and good relations programme, which is sensitive to differences in religion, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, gender, political opinion, marital status, those with dependants and those without dependants, and informs and impacts on the business and strategy of the organisation.

In reviewing the Disability Action Plan we worked with stakeholders to identify key priorities in fulfilling the “disability duties” i.e. promoting positive attitudes and encouraging the participation of disabled people in public life. Their informed contribution has been significant in developing this Action Plan, and we thank them again for their work.

Our next step is to deliver the outcomes identified in this Action Plan to enhance what we have achieved so far in all the various aspects of equality. While our aim is to continue to build on our work to promote equality of opportunity we recognise that barriers exist in relation to opportunities for disabled people to participate in all aspects of public life, and in relation to perceptions of disabled people in all areas of society. Our hope is that this Action Plan, working alongside the plans of other public bodies in local government, health, education and other important areas, will combine to make a real difference to the lives of people with disabilities in our community.

Professor Peter Roberts, Chair
Executive

Clark Bailie, Chief

1.0 Introduction

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Housing Executive is required when carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life (i.e. 'the disability duties').

Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Housing Executive is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a **Disability Action Plan** showing how it proposes to fulfil these duties in relation to its functions.

The Housing Executive is committed to effectively implementing the disability duties and this disability action plan. We will allocate resources (in terms of people, time and money) in order to effectively implement this plan and where appropriate, build objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into corporate and annual operating plans.

Effective internal arrangements will also be put in place to ensure that the disability duties are complied with and the Disability Action Plan fully implemented. We will ensure the effective communication of this Plan to staff and will provide all necessary training and guidance for staff on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.

We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual report to the Equality Commission on the implementation of the plan as well as carrying out a five yearly review of the plan.

Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating the Disability Action Plan and the point of contact within the Housing Executive is:

Name: Tony Steed

Title: Equality Unit Manager

Address: The Housing Centre,

2 Adelaide Street,

Belfast, BT2 8PB

Telephone number: 02895 982 556

Textphone: 18001 034 4892 0900

Email: tony.steed@nihe.gov.uk

The Plan and our annual progress report to the Equality Commission will be made available on our website

www.nihe.gov.uk .

2.0 Commitment

The Housing Executive is committed to the fulfilment of its disability duties in all parts of its organisation. Overall responsibility for determining policy on how this will be achieved lies with the Board. Day to day responsibility for implementation of the Action Plan lies with the Chief Executive who, through the Equality Unit, will be responsible for the implementation of administration arrangements to ensure that the disability duties are complied with by the organisation in carrying out its functions.

As part of its corporate planning process, the Housing Executive will build objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into corporate and business plans. These will be reflected at all levels of strategic planning within the organisation including individual staff objectives and annual plans. Progress on meeting objectives, including those relating to the disability duties will be monitored and reported on at the most senior level within the organisation.

Individual performance will be monitored and reviewed through performance review arrangements.

We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual progress report on the implementation of this plan to the Equality Commission and to carrying out a five year review of the plan, or plans submitted to the Equality Commission over the five year review period.

3.0 Consultation

The Housing Executive is committed to carrying out consultation in a meaningful manner in the development of its disability duties. To inform the preparation of this revised plan and the development of our Disability Duties we discussed the plan with a range of representative groups at the Full Consultative Forum on Equality in May 2019 and engaged with the Disability Forum in September 2019.

In addition, we will continue to seek the views of disabled people in relation to the further development of the Plan. To do this the Housing Executive can engage on a number of levels; firstly at a regional representative group level (the Consultative Forum on Equality and the Disability Forum), and secondly at a local level through the involvement of residents groups, Housing Community Networks and local voluntary and community organisations.

Through our consultation networks the Housing Executive has and will continue to:

- **identify the barriers faced by disabled people in participating in public life in general and specifically any barriers they may encounter or have encountered in relation to their dealings with the Housing Executive;**
- **identify opportunities for the Housing Executive to promote positive attitudes;**

- **set priorities and identify opportunities for encouraging participation in public life; and**
- **monitor and review the effectiveness of measures taken and the proposals outlined in the Plan.**

As part of our ongoing consultation processes barriers to effective consultation will be removed by ensuring accessibility to documents on request, in a reasonable timeframe and in appropriate formats as listed on page 2. We recognise the importance of engaging with disabled people during the life of the Plan and of establishing ways to effectively communicate information to young disabled people whilst taking into account additional dimensions such as ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation and religious belief.

The Housing Executive endeavours to ensure high standards of consultation and will apply this by giving full consideration to the following when planning and conducting consultation.

- the time of day and length of meetings
- the appropriateness of the venue and whether it is accessible for people with disabilities
- the use of appropriate language
- is a Sign Language Interpreter required
- payment of expenses
- Allowing adequate time when consulting or reviewing progress for groups and individuals to consult amongst themselves as part of the process of forming a view on the implementation of this scheme

The Housing Executive believes it is important that disabled people are involved in the implementation, monitoring and review of the Plan. The actions the Housing Executive wishes to implement are set out in the Disability Action Plan at Appendix 1 and it should be noted that the Plan is a working document and will be subject to change as actions are completed and new actions added. We also welcome views and comments on these actions and will consider amendments and additions on the basis of the comments we receive.

In addition to planned events we may wish to further discuss the implementation of the Plan by other methods such as:

- contacting individuals or advisory groups
- establishing consultative panels, developing internet discussion groups or initiating telephone focus groups
- conducting surveys

The Housing Executive believes that building on the good relationships that already exist with disability organisations, staff and customers will allow for two-way discussions which will give disabled people an opportunity to provide feedback in a constructive manner, on the ways in which we are implementing the disability duties. In addition, to ensure the effective and ongoing consideration of disability issues the following measures are place:

- the progress of the Disability Action Plan is a standing item on the agenda of the Housing Executive's Consultative Forum on Equality.
- We have agreed to meet annually with the Housing Executive's Disability Forum to discuss the progress of the plan.

4.0 Functions

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (the Housing Executive) was established as a Non-Departmental Public Body by the Housing Executive Act (Northern Ireland) 1971.

Whilst the Housing Executive continues as a single statutory organisation, for budgetary and accounting classification purposes there is now a dual reporting arrangement where the Regional Services and Landlord Services are managed as separate entities. This revision took effect from the 1st of April 2014, when NIHE was re-classified, following a determination by the Office for National Statistics and the Department of Finance and Personnel, as follows:

- Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) – Regional Services

- Quasi-Public Corporation - Landlord Services

The reclassification introduced important changes as to how each business area is funded with separate budgetary monitoring and reporting requirements.

The Regional Services business is funded almost entirely through government grant and is subject to more stringent budgetary and reporting controls placed on a Non Departmental Public Body within the central government funding structure. The Landlord Services body, by comparison, is almost entirely funded, on the revenue account, through rental income with minimal government funding. This means that the ability of the Landlord business to deliver its services successfully is dependent on the income it generates and collects.

Under the terms of the 1971 Act, the Housing Executive assumed the housing responsibilities of some 65 separate authorities and became Northern Ireland's single comprehensive regional housing authority, with responsibility to:

- regularly examine housing conditions and housing requirements;
- draw up wide ranging programmes to meet these needs;
- effect the closure, demolition and clearance of unfit houses;
- effect the improvement of the conditions of the housing stock;
- encourage the provision of new housing;
- establish housing information and advisory services;
- consult with District Councils and the Northern Ireland Housing Council;
- manage its own housing stock in Northern Ireland;
- fulfil the role of Home Energy Conservation Authority for Northern Ireland, and
- implementation of the Supporting People Programme.

5.0 The Organisation

Responsibility for general policy, management and operation of the Housing Executive is vested in a 10 person Board. Following Ministerial approval, Board members are appointed by the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities. The Housing Council nominates four members to the Minister from its membership.

The Housing Executive is currently subject to the overall direction and control of the Minister for Communities.

Day to Day management of the Housing Executive is delegated to the Chief Executive, and five Directors. The Equality Unit comes under the management of the Director of Corporate Services.

The Housing Executive has its headquarters in Belfast. The organisation delivers its mainstream customer services through a network offices located throughout Northern Ireland.

6.0 Public Life Positions

The range of public life positions over which the Housing Executive has responsibility are as follows:-

- The Board of the Housing Executive
- The Housing Community Network at Area and Local level
- The Housing Community Forum Central Panel
- The Strategic Cohesion Forum
- The Consultative Forum on Equality
- The Disability Forum
- The Rural Forum

7.0 Previous Measures

Outlined below are some of the key measures which the Housing Executive has already taken to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people and encouraging the participation of disabled people in public life

- Disability Awareness Training
- E-Learning
- Workplace policies and Reasonable Adjustments
- Recruitment policies
- Accessibility policies
- User involvement policies
- Policy Proofing
- Local Projects
- Promote Positive Imagery
- Attitudinal Studies
- Communication Policies
- Development of Disability Forum
- Partnership Working
- Disability Awareness in construction and contracts
- Design Standards Toolkit
- Wheelchair Standard Social Housing
- Hate Crime Harassment Toolkit
- To raise awareness of people with autism

8.0 Action Measures

8.1 How the Updated Disability Action Plan will be published

Following submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, this Plan will be available by contacting:

Name: Tony Steed

Title: Equality Unit Manager

Address: The Housing Centre, 2 Adelaide Street, Belfast, BT2 8PB

Telephone number: 02895 982 556

Textphone: 18001 034 4892 0900

Email: tony.steed@nihe.gov.uk

The Disability Action Plan will be available on the Housing Executive's website www.nihe.gov.uk

The Housing Executive will, through our ongoing work with people with disabilities and people with learning disabilities find appropriate ways of communicating the Plan. As previously stated the Plan will be made available in alternative formats on request. Consideration will also be given for requests to translate the Plan for people who speak a different language.

In addition, all employees will be able to access the Plan online and will be provided with a paper copy on request.

8.2 Proposed Measures

The measures which we propose to take cover the period of this revised Disability Action Plan from 2020 to 2025 are outlined in Appendix 1, together with performance indicators and targets. As mentioned at section 3.0, the Plan is a working document and will be subject to change as actions are completed and new actions added. We also welcome views and comments on these actions and will consider amendments and additions on the basis of the comments we receive.

The Housing Executive will monitor and review policies and practices to ensure that the disability equality duties are being met. Monitoring the progress of this Plan will be incorporated into the reporting systems on equality issues and distributed to statutory consultees. Senior management will be informed of progress as part of the annual review process and via the minutes of the Consultative Forum on Equality.

The annual review of the Plan will also form part of the monitoring and review process and assist in drafting appropriate targets and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the next year, whilst reporting on the achievement, or otherwise, of those set for the period of the annual review. As mentioned previously the Disability Action Plan is a standing item on the Consultative Forum on Equality, which facilitates how the plan is progressing and the introduction of new actions.

Targets and KPIs have been set out in the Action Plan. Some targets are very specific, whilst others are more general, reflecting the nature of the challenges.

The Housing Executive's Equality Unit will be directly responsible for compliance with the requirements of the Act and reporting to the Equality Commission.

We are committed to effectively engaging with disabled people in the production, implementation, monitoring and review of this Plan. We will take measures to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and
- encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

The proposed measures, which relate to both customers and staff are set out in Appendix 1.

APPENDIX 1: Proposed Measures

Objective 1: TRAINING: Mandatory Action		
Measures	Timescale	Performance Indicators/target
<p>Training on general Disability Equality Awareness delivered to all Staff including Board members and new recruits. This will include training on Disability Equality Legislation and on the duties included in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).</p> <p>Training on the duties will include promoting equality of opportunity; eliminating discrimination; eliminating harassment; encouraging participation in public life; and steps to meet the needs of disabled people.</p>	Ongoing	<p>A minimum of 10 sessions of Disability Awareness training, which is part of Equality Awareness Training will be completed in each of the financial years of the plan.</p> <p>Training is ongoing, relevant and updated to take into consideration amendments and new inclusions to the DDA as required.</p>
KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Equality Unit		
Objective 2: POSITIVE ATTITUDES		

Measures	Timescale	Performance Indicators/target
<p>The Dementia Friendly Homes initiative has been rolled out across Northern Ireland with over 50 Dementia Champions trained in every Area Office. We have procured Dementia Homes packs with daily living aids (e.g. Memory white board, dementia friendly telephone, dementia friendly clock etc.) in order to assist our tenants living with dementia and these will be distributed by the Dementia Champions as/when required.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Ongoing support to assist tenants living with dementia to sustain their tenancies. The Housing Executive has been recognised by the Dementia Friendly Awards 2019 as the Dementia Friendly Large Organisation of the Year for this project.</p>
<p>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Housing Services</p>		
<p>Building a Better Understanding of Mental Health for Frontline Staff booklet developed by Landlord Services. The booklet has been developed to support staff to work successfully and effectively with both tenants and customers who present with various mental health and</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Frontline staff are asked to familiarise themselves with the booklet to help obtain a better understanding of mental health and wellbeing issues that may affect Housing Executive customers. This was supported by a series of awareness sessions for staff held across the organisation during the financial year 2019/20.</p> <p>The next stage for our staff will be the procurement</p>

<p>wellbeing needs.</p>		<p>of Mental Health Awareness Training for all frontline Landlord Services staff as part of our Customer Support & Tenancy Sustainment Strategy. The booklet will be reviewed following the development and delivery of this training.</p>
<p>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Housing Services</p>		
<p>The Housing Executive is working to become a JAM Friendly Organisation. The Just a Minute (JAM) Card is an innovation from NOW Group.</p> <p>The JAM Card allows people with learning difficulties, autism or communication barriers to alert others discreetly and in a non-verbal manner that they need a little extra time and patience.</p> <p>JAM Card training will be provided by the Now group to ensure staff are equipped to provide excellent customer service to people with learning difficulties, autism and communication barriers.</p>	<p>JAM Champion Training for 15 staff members completed October 2019.</p>	<p>The project will enhance the ability of staff to communicate with vulnerable groups and improve the standard of customer service.</p> <p>Complete roll in will establish and tag the Housing Executive as a JAM friendly organisation.</p> <p>E- Learning & JAM Card Awareness Training will be conducted across the organisation over the period of the plan.</p>

<p>Training will be a combination of E-learning, JAM Card Awareness Training and Champion Training.</p>		
<p>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Housing Services</p>		
<p>Specialist Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Assessment to assess an employees for specialist equipment e.g. a specialist chair due to a medical condition. If an employee has a medical condition which may require specialist equipment, over the cost of £1000; or where specialist assistance is required to identify equipment required; The Housing Executive's Corporate Health & Safety Department's Display Screen Equipment Risk Assessors may request that the employee contacts Access to Work (only the employee can contact Access to Work) to assist with the assessment process and gain a suitable and</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>The Corporate Health & Safety Department to continue to carry out Specialist DSE Assessments for employees.</p>

<p>sufficient outcome.</p> <p>Access to Work (NI) can help people with disabilities who wish to take up employment or who are in work and experience difficulty related to their disability. It can also help employers who wish to recruit or retain people with disabilities in employment. It can assist employers with making reasonable adjustments within the workplace.</p>		
<p>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Corporate Health & Safety Department</p>		
<p>Housing Executive's Learning & Development Team launched the Building Resilience, Mindful Manager and Mental Health First Aid training sessions in 2018 in partnership with Action Mental Health (AMH).</p> <p>41 members of staff across the organisation are now trained as Mental Health First Aiders via AMH. Staff trained as Mental</p>	<p>Contract with AMH ended on 31/03/20.</p>	<p>A total of 151 staff completed some form of training under the programme. Analysis of delegate feedback indicates all those who attended agree/strongly agree that the training they undertook was relevant and of value, and will help them make positive change.</p> <p>The Learning & Development Team is working with AMH to evaluate the impact of the training programme. This includes a survey issued to all past participants, and a focus group exercise. It is hoped</p>

<p>Health First Aiders will be able to recognise the signs and symptoms of common mental health illnesses and guide a colleague towards the right support. Details of Mental Health First Aiders are available on Gateway (the Housing Executive's intranet) and published in various office locations in the same way as Workplace First Aiders.</p>		<p>that the findings will help inform future organisational requirements in this area and will be reported in this Action Plan.</p>
<p>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Learning & Development Team</p>		
<p>Objective 3: ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION</p>		
<p>Measures</p>	<p>Timescale</p>	<p>Performance Indicators/target</p>
<p>Surveys conducted by the Housing Executive will continue to capture information on whether respondents and household members (where applicable) have a disability. This includes the annual Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey (CTOS), the House Condition Survey (every five years) and other surveys</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Continued inclusion of disabled people in all research and reports on findings/disability issues published were applicable.</p>

<p>carried out from time to time such as the Public Attitudes Survey, the Employee Engagement Survey (every two years), as well as other issue-/programme-specific surveys and research.</p>		
<p>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Research Unit</p>		
<p>Objective 4: COMMUNICATION</p>		
<p>Disabled people have a right to receive communication in the media they understand.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>The Housing Executive has in place a communication support service for meeting customer communication needs as and when required.</p> <p>The Equality Unit in liaison with Housing Benefit Policy and Landlord Services have measures in place to ensure visually impaired customers receive correspondence in appropriate formats e.g. large print, Braille, and email correspondence rather than by letter.</p> <p>The Housing Executive launched its new website in March 2019, which has Browsealoud technology improving accessibility to the organisation's website (see link) https://www.nihe.gov.uk/accessibility</p>

KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Equality Unit		
Improving access to Housing Executive services for deaf customers.	2020/2021	NIHE to examine the development of Video Relay and Video Remote Interpreting services for staff and customers. Pilot to be developed in the Housing Centre, Belfast subject to feasibility.
KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Equality Unit/ I.T. Department		
Objective 5: OTHER AREAS		
Inter-Departmental Review of Adaptations (IDR) Develop a good practice guide for design features for people with sight loss and dementia.	TBC Ongoing	The Inter-Departmental Review of Adaptations: Final Report & Action Plan were signed off by Minister of Health and Minister for Communities. Currently awaiting N.I. Executive approval to facilitate publication. A draft Architects "Design Guide" has been developed which will be incorporated within the Design Standards Toolkit. The design guide will provide advice on colour variation, light levels, signage for rooms such as shower rooms etc. It will also signpost designers to other sources of specialist

		<p>information. A meeting was to take place in April to finalise the Draft, sign-off, seek necessary approval and launch the revised Draft however Covid-19 related disruption will now delay the delivery of the final strand of this work.</p>
<p>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Adaptations Policy Unit</p>		
<p>Accessible Housing Register (AHR)</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>An AHR has 3 discreet functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation Tool – it will enable housing authorities to identify specific properties that may meet the needs of a particular group of applicants on the waiting list • Information Tool - Landlords can identify where their accessible stock is located and make best use of that stock. It will equip staff with stock information to enable them to assist disabled people to make more informed housing choices. • Planning Tool – it will assist with the identification of gaps in provision of wheelchair accessible accommodation & allow NIHE Place Shapers to tailor their support for the provision of new accommodation in those locations. <p>Interim AHR arrangements are currently in place.</p> <p>The Housing Executive is currently working with the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) to develop an In-House AHR solution.</p>

		<p>The AHR was programmed for completion and go live in May 2020 however due to the impact of the Covid-19 virus the completion date will slip. Both the Housing Executive & NIFHA are committed to the implementation of the AHR and aim to complete as early as practically possible during 2020/21.</p> <p>The Housing Executive is also exploring the potential of a private sector interface which will allow accessible properties for rent/sale in the private sector to be advertised on the Housing Executive's website.</p> <p>This facility will be restricted to those properties adapted via Disabled Facilities Grants or accessible stock sold under the right to buy schemes.</p>
KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Adaptations Policy		
<p>The Housing Executive will conduct disability audits of its premises every 3 to 5 years. Any planned works will ensure all properties are fully compliant with current Disability Access requirements. The NIHE adopts a "proactive" approach to providing disability access (so far as reasonably practicable) to its offices and public areas. The needs of people with disabilities will be fully considered in the fitting out of new accommodation and refurbishment/adaptation schemes in</p>	<p>April 2020 to March 2023</p>	<p>Currently all our public facing offices have level access or ramped access entrance doors, loop systems and lower level counters as set out in the Housing Executive's Office Accommodation Manual. Any further developments in relation to Housing Executive buildings will be reported on during the lifetime of this plan.</p>

existing accommodation, which will provide an opportunity to include work to improve accessibility.		
KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Facilities		