

# **South Northamptonshire Council**



## **Disability Equality Scheme December 2006 - December 2009**

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## **1.Forward**

We are pleased to publish the first Disability Equality Scheme to be produced by South Northamptonshire Council. The scheme forms part of our comprehensive equality policy, which sets out the Council's commitment to equality of opportunity to employment and council services for everybody. The Disability Equality Scheme reinforces this commitment by identifying a specific Action Plan that will help to ensure that disabled people achieve equality of opportunity when accessing council employment and services.

The Disability Equality Scheme offers a unique opportunity for disabled people in the district, disabled employees of the council and the rest of the communities in South Northamptonshire to play a part in achieving equality for people with disabilities.

We believe that the results of the scheme will be improvements in service delivery, more positive attitudes to disabled people and a better understanding of their needs so that equality of opportunity between disabled people and the rest of the community can be achieved.



Jean Morgan ,  
Chief Executive



Councillor Sandra Barnes,  
Leader of Council

## **2. Introduction**

### **2.1. Introduction to the scheme**

The disability equality scheme emerges from the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), which made it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on disability. *‘A person has a disability for the purposes of this Act if he or she has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities’*

The Act also requires organisations to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to ensure that people with a disability can access and participate in services and employment.

Further to this were the Disability Discrimination (Public Authorities Statutory Duties) Regulations 2005, which recognise the importance of having a specific commitment to disability equality amongst public bodies.

Therefore the law now includes a responsibility for all public organisations to publish and implement a Disability Equality Scheme by 5<sup>th</sup> December 2006.

### **2.1 Overall Policy Framework and Core Areas**

Our Disability Equality Scheme sets out the action to be taken in order to meet the following objectives:

- To eliminate unlawful discrimination
- To eliminate disability related harassment
- To promote equality of opportunities
- To promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- To encourage participation by disabled people in public life
- To meet disabled people’s needs even if this requires more favourable treatment

An important element in achieving these objectives is the **involvement** of disabled employees, residents and disabled people’s groups in deciding how we can realise these aims, so that the scheme will meet the hopes and expectations of disabled people in the district.

The above objectives are the overall framework for the policy and the core area that will be covered are:

- Building access and building environment
- Communication
- Training
- Service Delivery
- Employment
- Democratic participation

### **2.3. What it means to you**

If you have a disability, you can expect to be treated equally and without prejudice and have your communication and access needs met, both as employees and service users of the council. We will take steps to encourage and reinforce this commitment amongst our staff and service users.

You will have the opportunity to take part and be involved in the development and future of the scheme, as well as to influence the action plan. This action plan aims to make a real difference to the lives of disabled people in South Northamptonshire, as it has been formulated from their specific needs and ideas.

## **3. Context and Background**

### **3.1. The Disability Equality Scheme and the social model of disability**

The introduction of the Disability Equality Scheme will underpin the council's commitment to the Social Model of disability. This explanation considers disability to be created by society's attitudes rather than the individual's condition:

'We are disabled by a society that is geared to the needs of those who can walk, have perfect sight and hearing, can speak distinctly, and are intellectually dexterous. The disablement lies in the construction of society, not in the condition of an individual.'

Simon Brisenden (1998)

It is this difficulty that the Disability Equality Scheme will address. By involving staff and residents with disabilities in South Northamptonshire, we aim to ensure that the council does not foster this 'disabling' environment but creates one in which the needs of disabled people are integrated into everything we do so that everybody can participate on equal terms in all of the council's activities.

### **3.2. Disabled people in South Northamptonshire**

The 2001 census did not identify people who would be defined as disabled under the DDA, but rather used an alternative measure of "limiting long-term illness". The census shows that 12.9 % of the population of South Northamptonshire had a long-term illness in 2001 and that 26.2% of households had one or more persons with such an illness. These figures are significantly lower than the comparative percentages for England and Wales as a whole (18.2% and 34.1% respectively).

3.7% of council employees declared that they had a disability in 2006.

There is always the possibility, however, that the recorded figures do not reflect reality as many people do not consider themselves as disabled (due to the old fashioned stigma) and thus may not be recorded in the data.

### **3.3. Activity already in place**

In August 2003 the strategy "*Access to Services (for disabled people)*" was approved by the South Northamptonshire Council cabinet. This document sets out a high level strategy for access to services for disabled people (see appendix 1) plus an action plan for the following three years.

Access to services was defined as physical access to the environments where services are provided or access to information on services whether printed, telephone, personal contact, computer related, or auxiliary aids etc. or the policies, practices and procedures of access to the service or product that the council provides.

The Disability Equality Scheme will be a continuation of the strategy with continual input from staff, the public and council partners.

### 3.4. Our background to the Disability Equality Scheme

The Council's vision is:

*“The Council will through its community leadership preserve, enhance, improve and develop the quality of life of all residents and businesses in the district.”*

This vision is supported by 8 aims, some of which the Disability Equality Scheme will play a key part in achieving. These are:

<b>COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP &amp; PARTNERSHIP WORKING</b>
Act on behalf of our communities and work with others to ensure provision of appropriate services
<b>ENVIRONMENT</b>
Conserve, maintain and enhance the quality of the local environment Ensure development meets the needs of the local community.
<b>SOCIAL INCLUSION</b>
Promote, encourage and deliver access to our services and help local networks and agencies to support all sections of the community
<b>QUALITY OF LIFE</b>
Contribute to a safer community by seeking to reduce crime and the fear of crime by working with our key partners, and promote leisure and cultural activities to improve people's physical, social, mental and emotional well-being
<b>ECONOMY</b>
Ensure that the district's economic well-being is protected and promoted
<b>SUSTAINABILITY</b>
Promote principles of sustainability in all council activities and encourage others by example to ensure effective and efficient use of resources
<b>COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT</b>
Encourage vital and cohesive communities by

understanding their diverse needs and encouraging democratic participation in what we do
<b>ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>
Be recognised as an excellent organisation that people are proud to work for and be associated with

### 3.5 Overall Aim

The overall aim for access to services for disabled people is the following:

*“To develop long term and mutually beneficial relationships with our disabled customers and partners. We do this by understanding their needs, giving advice on the Disability Discrimination Act and providing them with high quality accessibility to our services.”*

### 3.6 Our Policy on Equality in Service Delivery

The council has a comprehensive equality policy that states:

We are committed to equality and will:

- Recognise and value diversity
- Take steps to ensure that all barriers to fair access, treatment and outcomes for our service users are removed
- Promote our commitment to equalities within the local community & influence partners to adhere to good practice
- Engage and involve our local communities in order to improve the fairness and accessibility of all the services we provide
- Ensure our policies and practice take into account the nature and make-up of our district
- Ensure that all employment practises are fair and that all potential and existing members of staff are treated in a fair and consistent manner
- Engage and involve our staff in development of best practice and seek their views on how to meet a diverse range of needs

These commitments support and reinforce the Disability Equality Scheme.

### **3.7. Links to other Policies**

This document has links to the following:

- Access to Services (for disabled people) Strategy (2003-2006)
- Comprehensive Equality Policy
- Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy
- Customer and Citizens Access Strategy and Service Model
- Recruitment and Selection Policy/ guidance
- Dignity at Work (DAW) Policy

## **4. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review**

### **4.1. Implementing the scheme.**

There is an established structure in place within the Council that will make sure that this scheme is interpreted by each department into specific actions for their services.

The Corporate Equality Group meets regularly and is attended by Councillor Andrew Grant, Calvin Bell, Executive Director, Nicola Capewell, Head of Personnel & Executive Support Barbara di Cara, Acting Access Officer, and Jessica Goodall, Policy Officer.

This group has been working on the Race Equality duties for the past 3 years and with the help of external consultants has produced a Comprehensive Equality Policy. This Policy will help us to achieve Level 1 of the Local Government Equality Standard.

### **4.2. Involving disabled people**

The council has always consulted with disabled people in the district and we have been successful in raising and solving many issues.

However, an important requirement of the new law is for us not only to consult but *involve* people with disabilities in developing and implementing the disability equality scheme.

We will therefore follow the principle of 'nothing about us without us' and involve disabled people at all stages to ensure that the scheme and action plan represents the issues important to them.

The council has an ongoing programme of engagement with local disability groups and we hold meetings such as the South Northants Ability Northants meeting, Tenants forums, disabled access (planning) meeting and Ability Network South.

These groups will now be actively involved in developing the scheme.

We also hold regular meetings with our disabled employees where they are given the opportunity to discuss any issues and problems that they encounter whilst working at the council. We have completed an exercise where disabled people identify barriers to equality around the council building on a number of occasions, and this will also form part of our impact assessment for the scheme.

The issues raised in all of these meetings now form the action plan for the scheme, and will also establish the impact of the scheme as it is put into practise. We have also undertaken qualitative and quantitative research into satisfaction with the Council as and employer and a service provider.

Disabled people have been actively involved in creating our action plan, by highlighting areas and issues for action under the 6 actions set out by the law. Our process for deciding on actions is shown in appendix 2.

### **4.3. Impact assessments**

An important part of the Disability Equality Scheme is the monitoring of its impact against the aims it has set out to achieve. Impact assessments will involve gathering information from disabled people about how the scheme is working, which could take the form of questionnaires, focus groups or interviews. This information will then be used to decide whether the scheme is working to promote equality, and what more could be done to ensure this. We will also use the following measures:

- Monitoring complaints
- Feedback from the User Satisfaction Survey;
- Qualitative and quantitative research on staff
- Public sickness absence records
- Harassment records
- 

The impact assessments will also be important in informing disability equality schemes of the future.

#### **4.4. Complaints**

An important part of the assessment of the scheme will be the positive use of feedback received from complaints. All complaints received will be monitored so that we can identify whether they are an equality issue that needs to be addressed under the scheme. We encourage complaints and comments, and have a customer care policy that gives guidance on how to do this which is available online at:

[http://www.southnorthants.gov.uk/council\\_democracy/docs/SNC\\_Customer\\_Charter\\_Nov\(1\).pdf](http://www.southnorthants.gov.uk/council_democracy/docs/SNC_Customer_Charter_Nov(1).pdf)

## **APPENDIX 1**

**This is the Access to Services Strategy (for disabled people) principles in summary 2003 to 2006**

<b>The philosophy</b>	<b>Equality in the deliverance of services</b>
<b>The vision</b>	<b>To eradicate physical and information barriers from services</b>
<b>The overall aim</b>	<b>To develop long term &amp; mutually beneficial relationships with our disabled customers and partners</b>
<b>The high level strategic aims With high level objectives</b>	<p><b>To listen/involve our customers (CD2)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To re-instigate a disabled group so as to understand their needs and involve them in our decision making.</li> </ul> <p><b>To become customer focused (CD3)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To access and then reduce complaints from disabled people.</li> <li>• To improve the transport needs of disabled people.</li> </ul> <p><b>To continually improve (OD1, ECO1)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve the information about services for disabled people (via written means, post, verbal, Internet)</li> <li>• To undertake an in-depth look at the present council processes with the purpose of re-engineering them to make them more efficient and focused on disabled customer needs.</li> </ul> <p><b>To work with partners (SI2 CLP1)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To form partnerships to mutual benefit.</li> </ul> <p><b>To implement national policies (DDA) (SI1)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop accessible knowledge of the Disability Discrimination Act to council staff/managers, members, customers, community and businesses.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To improve accessibility to South Northamptonshire Council owned buildings (80% accessible at present) so that they are more accessible to disabled people.</li> </ul>
<b>The Scope</b>	<b>South Northamptonshire Council wide</b>
<b>The scale</b>	<b>Everyone is responsible</b>
<b>The standards</b>	<b>Right first time – every time-service promise</b>
<b>The Control</b>	<b>The cost of customer service</b> <b>Customer perception</b> <b>The cost of non-service</b>
<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Improved customer relationships</b> <b>Improved reputation</b>

#### Key success criteria

- Measuring the community base
- Measuring the customer complaints
- Measuring customer satisfaction
- Measuring attitude of staff
- Measuring sickness levels

Measuring where we are now in terms of structures, processes, service, customers' needs and measuring in one years time.

The Disability Scheme will be a continuation of the strategy with continual input from staff, the public and partners.

**APPENDIX 2 Process Map for Disability Equality Scheme**

