

West Lothian Disability Equality Forum

Annual Report

2008



Foreword

Welcome to the first annual report of the West Lothian Disability Equality Forum. The Forum was approved and launched by the West Lothian Community Planning Partnership in October 2007, and has made significant progress in its first year in both involving people with disabilities and changing the way public services are delivered in West Lothian.

The Forum is critical to the success of public authorities in the area. We work directly with authorities to help them ensure that they are responsive to the needs of service users with disabilities, to improve services, increase value for money as well as assisting authorities to meet their legal obligations under disability legislation.

The involvement of people with disabilities in the work of public services in West Lothian, via the Forum, is helping to mainstream disability equality throughout all functions of the public bodies with which we work. This report outlines some of the key achievements and challenges during our first year of operation.

The commitment of the volunteer Forum members cannot be overstated. From an initial membership of 29 in October 2007 the Forum now has over 100 members. I would like to thank members for their support and enthusiasm over the past year and for making the Forum a real success in such a short space of time. I also wish to thank those who have attended from the Community Planning Partnership for their commitment to the Forum and their focus on improving the lives of people with disabilities in West Lothian.

Gordon Mungall

Chair, West Lothian Disability Equality Forum

October 2008

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Terms of Reference

Background

As required by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, West Lothian Council published its Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan in December 2006. One of the key parts of the development of the Scheme was meaningful and relevant involvement of people with disabilities from the community. To meet the council's legal obligations to involve disabled people in the development of the Scheme the West Lothian Disability Equality Forum was created. The Forum comprised volunteers with disabilities from the community of West Lothian, working in partnership with representatives of each council service to devise a relevant and robust action plan to identify and eradicate disability discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity.

Following the publication of the Scheme, it was agreed that the Forum would continue to meet in order to serve a monitoring, audit and involvement role in partnership with the council, to ensure that the Disability Equality Scheme is implemented and that disability equality is mainstreamed throughout all council services. In addition, it was proposed that the Forum also consider the Disability Equality Schemes of public sector partners operating in West Lothian.¹

Disability Equality Forum

Following the launch of the West Lothian Council and public sector partners Disability Equality Schemes, the West Lothian Disability Equality Forum have taken forward the following key tasks in partnership with West Lothian Council and public sector partners operating in West Lothian:

¹ Public sector partners that operate in West Lothian and have a legal requirement to devise and implement Disability Equality Schemes include West Lothian Council; NHS West Lothian; Communities Scotland; Lothian and Borders Police; Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service; West Lothian College; JobCentre Plus; Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothians; Oatridge College; The Pension Service

- To record and collate statistics on the number of complaints or issues related to disability equality generated across West Lothian, and to use trend information to highlight what the Forum believes should be seen as priorities on disability equality for the council or appropriate public sector partners;
- To devise and manage a systematic process for auditing progress on all council and public sector partner's action plans within their respective Disability Equality Scheme;
- To make specific and general recommendations to the council and public sector partners on areas for improvement following the auditing process;
- To publicise and market the Forum to the wider community to develop confidence in council and public sector partner's practices on disability equality; and
- To publish reports and press releases on the views and opinions of the Forum in relation to the performance of the council and public sector partners in meeting their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

In order to ensure that the needs of the council, public sector partners and the members of the community with disabilities in West Lothian are met, the council and public sector partners take forward the following actions:

- The council has formally recognised West Lothian Disability Equality Forum as its main vehicle for involvement of the community in ongoing development of its Disability Equality Scheme;
- The council and public sector partners support the audit and evaluation function of the Forum and ensure that relevant council and public sector partner representatives engage with the Forum as appropriate and reasonable to ensure that the Disability Equality Schemes are put into practice; and
- The council and public sector partners take reasonable steps to implement the recommendations of the Forum in relation to performance on Disability Equality Scheme implementation.

Disability West Lothian manage and co-ordinate the Forum on behalf of its membership, and are responsible for chairing meetings, taking minutes, managing finance and correspondence.

Intended Outcomes

The specific outcomes of each action of the Disability Equality Scheme are outlined within the published document for each relevant organisation.

The partnership approach outlined above to audit and evaluation of progress against each Scheme ensures that the council and public sector partners remain focused on their priorities related to disability equality. This process ensures that each of the relevant authorities are both meeting their requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and meeting the needs of people in West Lothian with disabilities.

Executive Summary

Since the launch of the Forum in October 2007 significant progress has been made in the involvement of people with disabilities within public services in West Lothian. Some of the key initiatives and developments that have taken place to help us achieve this progress include:

- **Involvement within Equality Impact Assessments** – Members of the Forum have been actively engaged in conducting equality impact assessments throughout a number of council services over the past year. Forum members have provided practical and strategic advice on how services can take specific account of disability issues.
- **Auditing of Disability Equality Scheme Progress** – The vast majority of council services and public sector partner organisations have attended meetings of the Forum, updating on progress against their Disability

Equality Schemes and debated challenges and achievements during the second year of Scheme implementation.

- **Involvement in the Council EIA Toolkit** – Forum members were involved in the development of the council's new Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit, ensuring that disability issues are given due regard and consideration within the assessments of council services.
- **Approval of the Council Disability Annual Report 2007** – As part of the council's commitment to the involvement of people with disabilities, the council's annual progress report on their Disability Equality Scheme cannot be published without the involvement of the Forum during the development of the report. The council's first report was published in December 2007 with direct involvement with members of the Forum.
- **Development Projects** – In collaboration with the West Lothian Access Committee, the Forum pro-actively supported the council in the practical disability considerations on a number of development projects, such as Carmondean Connected, improving access and facilities for people with disabilities.
- **Integrated Equality Scheme** – The Forum were directly involved in the debate and decision within the council to create an integrated equality scheme, covering each of the equality strand areas, for 2008 to 2011. The Forum has, and continues to, work hard to ensure that disability equality issues are prominent within this new structure.
- **Representation** – The Forum have worked to increase both the participation of people of disabilities from the community as well as the representation of the wide range of disabilities covered by the Disability Discrimination Act. This work has now led to a membership of over 100 individuals representing a diverse range of disabilities, from visible and physical to non-visible and mental disabilities.

Despite these significant areas of achievement, particularly given that this is the first year of the Forum's operation, much remains to be delivered over the coming year. The life of the first Disability Equality Schemes come to an end in December 2009, and there are important areas of action that must be implemented and maintained to ensure mainstreaming of equality is achieved. Ensuring completion of impact assessments and practical implementation of service level actions will be the Forum's key focus during the coming year. In addition, we hope to achieve further involvement and assessment of impact with the national public partners.

Disability Equality Scheme Performance

This section of the report highlights examples of performance by authorities and services that engaged with the Forum between October 2007 and September 2008. Examples of good practice and challenges to be addressed are outlined to highlight some of the specific work ongoing within authorities, and to show how involvement of people with disabilities is adding value to the organisations with which we work. For a full record of partners and services that have attended the Forum to date please see the annex.

The examples provided below are a small sample of issues identified and work taken forward in order to illustrate how the Forum operates in practice, to meet both the needs of people with disabilities and public partners.

Customer Services

The Forum highlighted a number of practical implications for people with disabilities during the development project for the new Carondean Connected customer service facility. The involvement of the Forum ensured physical accessibility to the new facility as well as practical suggestions on

how people with disabilities could access the new service delivery technology, which were taken on board pro-actively by the service.

Corporate Communications

Greater awareness of the availability of easy read options for people with reading and comprehension difficulties was discussed and recommended. This has been taken on board by the communications team during the revision of their corporate guidelines. Positive stories related to disability issues was raised as a good practice example, as the number of stories related to disability within mainstream publications has increased in recent months.

Education Services

Disability Equality has been integrated into mainstream activity within education pro-actively during the first two years of the Scheme. In terms of engagement of parents in education activity, the Forum recommended that the specific needs of parents with disabilities would need to be taken into account during wider development of parental involvement.

IT Services

Following the presentation and discussion related to accessibility of the council's website and IT infrastructure, the Forum is due to be involved in the test of the new accessibility standards to ensure that they meet the needs of people with disabilities in the community.

Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue

Significant progress against the action plan for 2006 to 2009 was commended by the Forum. Discussion took place related to challenges remaining in terms of alternative format information in easy read and for blind people. Recommendations from the Forum were taken forward.

Lothian and Borders Police

Following the attendance of the Police at the Forum, new direct links have been made with the disability community in West Lothian and the Police HQ in Edinburgh in terms of involvement. In addition, a regular link with the West Lothian division has been made, resulting in an invite to the Forum regarding advice on physical access, which the Forum will be taking forward in the forthcoming year.

West Lothian Licensing Board

As a separate legal entity to the council, the West Lothian Licensing Board requires to have its own Disability Equality Scheme. The level of involvement of people with disabilities during the development of the Board's Scheme for 2006 to 2009 was unclear. In order to address this issue in future, and for the development of annual reporting, it was agreed that the Board would be included as a partner within the Forum structure going forward.

Equality Impact Assessment Performance

This section of the report highlights the equality impact assessments conducted by West Lothian Council in which the Forum has engaged between October 2007 and September 2008. For further information on the equality impact assessment process or any of the specific issues arising from the assessments, please visit:

http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/council_and_government/751/

Assessments in which the Forum has been involved include:

- Community Transport and Fleet Management (Operational Services)
- Countryside (Property Services)
- Customer Information Services (Customer Services)

- Drug and Alcohol Team (Social Policy)
- Economic Development (Property and CP and Regeneration)
- Facilities Management (Operational Services)
- Health Improvement Team (Social Policy)
- Inprint (Operational Services)
- NETs and Land Services (Operational Services)
- Procurement Strategy (Finance Services)
- Registration Services (Customer Services)
- Revenues and Benefits (Finance Services)
- Roads Services (Operational Services)
- Waste Management (Operational Services)

At time of writing the Forum are also involved in reviewing assessments for Education Services.

The progress made on equality impact assessments over the past year has been significant from the council perspective. In addition to the assessments outlined above, further assessments have been completed in which the Forum will be involved in due course. One key area of focus for the Forum during the coming year will be to ensure that we are engaging with the other public community planning partners to ensure that assessments are being conducted and that people with disabilities are involved as appropriate.

Comments On Our Annual Report

As part of our ongoing effort to involve people with disabilities in West Lothian public performance, the Forum is always keen to hear from anyone with either comments or suggestions on how we can improve, thereby improving the performance of public authorities to help achieve disability equality.

If you have any comments on the contents of our annual report on progress, or want to get involved, please contact:

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Record of Attendance

Below provides a full list of organisational attendance at the Forum between October 2007 and September 2008.

Attended

- Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service
- Lothian and Borders Police
- Oatridge College
- West Lothian College
- West Lothian Council – Community Planning
- West Lothian Council – Corporate Communications
- West Lothian Council – Customer Services
- West Lothian Council – Education Services
- West Lothian Council – Finance Services
- West Lothian Council – IT Services
- West Lothian Council – Operational Services
- West Lothian Council – Property Services
- West Lothian Council – Social Policy
- West Lothian Licensing Board

Apologies

- Community Health and Care Partnership
- NHS Lothian

Attendance Outstanding

- JobCentre Plus
- Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothians
- The Pension Service
- West Lothian Council – CP and Regeneration Service
- West Lothian Council – Cultural Services
- West Lothian Council – Development and Regulatory Services
- West Lothian Council – Housing and Building Services