

West Lothian Disability Equality Community Forum

Annual Report

2009



Foreword

Welcome to the second 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 over the last twelve months 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 second year of operation.

The commitment of the volunteer Forum members cannot be overstated. I would like to thank members for their support and enthusiasm over the past year and for making the Forum a real success. I also wish to thank those who have attended from the Community Planning Partnership for their continued 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 2009

Contents	Page No.
Terms of Reference	4
Executive Summary	6
Disability Equality Scheme Performance	8
Equality Impact Assessment Performance	10
Comments on our Annual Report	11

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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 Lothian; Lothian and Borders Police; Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service; West Lothian College; JobCentre Plus; Scottish Enterprise; 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 set in relation to the disability equality duty are outlined within the relevant published document for each partner 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 publication of our first annual report in October 2008 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:

- **Integrated Equality Scheme** – Following the Forum's involvement during 2008 on the debate of the future structure of equality scheme work within the council, the Forum has worked hard to ensure that disability equality issues are prominent within the council's new Integrated Equality Scheme 2009 to 2012. The draft scheme was approved by the Forum prior to formal approval by the Council Executive in June 2009. The Forum looks forward to supporting the council in directly linking disability equality to the West Lothian Single Outcome Agreement through this integrated approach.

- **Involvement within Equality Impact Assessments** – Members of the Forum have continued to be actively engaged in conducting equality impact assessments throughout almost all council services over the past year. Forum members have provided practical and strategic advice on how services can take specific account of disability issues. In addition, a number of assessments involving partner stakeholders and agencies have also been taken forward with involvement of Forum members for the first time over the past year.
- **Auditing of Disability Equality Scheme Progress** – All council services and public sector partner organisations have now attended meetings of the Forum with two exceptions, updating on progress against their disability equality work and debating challenges and achievements during the final year of the 2006-2009 Disability Equality Scheme implementation.
- **Involvement in West Lothian Diversity Week 2008** – Representatives of the Forum were involved in the community planning partnership working group devised to coordinate and implement West Lothian Diversity Week 2008, an initiative to raise awareness of equality and diversity within partner workforces and members of the local community. The Forum Chair also attended a presentation for the Municipal Journal Awards 2009 as a critical friend on the council's application for Diversity Achievement of the Year, which was successful.
- **Approval of the Council Disability Annual Report 2008** – 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 second report on the 2006-2009 Scheme was published in December 2008 with direct involvement of Forum members.

- **Representation** – The Forum has worked to increase both the participation of people with 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 increase of over 150% since the launch of the Forum in October 2007, including individuals representing a diverse range of disabilities, from visible and physical to non-visible and mental disabilities.

Despite these significant areas of achievement over the past year, much remains to be delivered by public services in collaboration with the Forum going forward. The life of the first Disability Equality Schemes come to an end in December 2009. This provides an important opportunity for review of progress and priorities with public service providers, ensuring that disability equality remains in focus, as well as enabling debate on how disability equality priorities for the next three years should be shaped.

Ensuring involvement of people with disabilities within equality impact assessments for all public sector partners and review of organisational disability scheme priorities will be the Forum's key focus during the coming year. In addition, we hope to review our own structure to ensure that as many people from the diverse range of disabilities as possible can be involved in our work.

Disability Equality Scheme Performance

This section of the report highlights some key examples of performance by authorities and services that engaged with the Forum between October 2008 and September 2009. 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.

The examples provided below are a small sample of 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.

2020 Vision – Community Plan

Coordinated by the Council Community Planning Team, the Forum was involved in providing input to the 2020 Vision consultation from a disability perspective. This public consultation was devised to support and inform the 2020 Community Plan for West Lothian. The Forum was presented with an input on community planning and provided specific feedback on priorities for the local area both in general terms and specifically related to disability equality, including accessible housing and improved and inclusive public transportation.

NHS Lothian

The Forum discussed the priorities for the NHS Lothian Disability Equality Scheme 2009-2012 with representatives of the NHS, providing specific input on practical actions such as hospital and surgery accessibility to disability awareness of employees. The Forum meeting input was further supported by attendance of representatives at a Lothian wide involvement event to set priorities and actions for the new scheme.

Job Centre Plus

The presentation was well received by the Forum, with a wide ranging discussion on support and services available to people with disabilities. Recommendations included increased awareness of practical needs of people with physical disabilities when accessing employment opportunities and the need to take forward equality impact assessment involvement or consultation with people with disabilities.

Cultural Services

Consideration of the impact and accessibility of new websites used by Community Learning and Development were discussed by the Forum, with specific recommendations to ensure inclusive access provided.

Economic situation

The Forum was presented with an update on the projected impact of the current financial situation on council services. The presentation supported forum members to understand the context of future spending decisions in order to enable the Forum to continue to add value to council and partner services within the current financial context.

Equality Impact Assessment Performance

The progress made on equality impact assessments over the past year has been significant from the council perspective. In addition to the assessments in which the Forum has been involved (see link below), further assessments are planned 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.

For information on the equality impact assessment process within the council, please visit:

<http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/media/downloadoc/1799563/1846123/2156411>

For details of the assessments that have been conducted within the council, or for information related to any of the specific issues arising from the assessments, please visit:

<http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/sitecontent/documentlist/PolicyandEquality/?key=1778580>

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 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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