

# Disability Action Plan (updated)

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November 2015

**Housing**  
Executive

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## 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 closely with a wide range of disability and community organisations to identify key priorities in 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 revised Action Plan to further enhance the work we have achieved so far in all the various aspects of equality. While our aim is to continue to build on the work to promote equality of opportunity we recognise that barriers exist for disabled people in relation to opportunities available to them that permits full participation in 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.

Signed by:



Chairman



Chief Executive

## 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:-

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Title: Equality Unit Manager

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2 Adelaide Street,  
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A copy of the Plan, our annual progress report to the Equality Commission and our five year review of the plan will be made available on our website [www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk) . The Disability Action Plan will also be advertised widely. The Housing Executive will find appropriate ways of communicating the Plan to people with disabilities through our ongoing work with people with disabilities and people with learning disabilities

## **2.0 Commitment**

The Housing Executive is committed to the fulfilment of its disability duties in all parts of its organisation. The Housing Executive will also undertake a planned programme of communication and training on the disability duties for all staff, Directors and Board members.

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 review of this Plan the Housing Executive engaged with the Disability Forum to consider our policy position in relation to the issue of disability and to make recommendations on how this could be improved.

In addition, we are keen to seek the views of disabled people in relation to the further development of the Plan. To do this the Housing Executive is actively engaged on a number of levels; firstly at a regional representative group level (the Consultative Forum on Equality), 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.**

To further inform the preparation of this updated plan and to participate in the development of our Disability Duties we invited the members of the Consultative Forum on Equality, the Disability Forum and disability groups to a seminar held on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

In attendance were:

- Disability Forum Members
- SCNI
- Leonard Cheshire Disability
- Cedar Foundation
- STEP

The Consultative Forum Steering Group can advise on multi identity issues, e.g. BME groups, Migrant Workers, Women, Gay and Lesbian people and disability issues.

As part of our consultation processes barriers to effective consultation will be removed by ensuring accessibility to documents on request, in a timely fashion and in appropriate formats including DIASY, Braille, large print, disc and audio cassette. 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 is keen 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 of meetings
- the appropriateness of the venue and whether it is accessible for people with disabilities

- how the meeting will be run
- the use of appropriate language
- whether a signer or interpreter is necessary
- the provision of childcare and
- payment of expenses

The Housing Executive believes it is important that disabled people have been 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 appended at Appendix 1. We 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:

- contacting individuals
- contacting advisory groups
- establishing consultative panels
- developing an internet discussion group
- initiating telephone focus groups
- conducting surveys
- other innovative ways of involving disabled people.

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. When consulting or reviewing progress we will allow adequate time for groups and individuals to consult amongst themselves as part of the process of forming a view on the implementation of this scheme.

In addition, to ensure the effective and ongoing consideration of disability issues, Disability Action Plan progress will become a standing item on the agenda of the Consultative Forum on Equality Steering Group.



## 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.

In pursuing the above objectives the Housing Executive established policies and procedures to deliver its services. Main policy areas include:

Supporting People	Homelessness	Finance
Housing Needs Assessment	Building Standards	Improvements
Housing Association New Build Programmes	Private Sector Grants	Traveller Accommodation
Community Safety	Complaints Procedures	Purchase & Disposal of Land & Property
Commercial Property	Procurement	Employment
Regeneration	Rent	House Sales
Community Development	Urban & Rural Regeneration	Neighbourhood Renewal
Housing Benefits	Maintenance	Energy Efficiency
Good Relations	Equality	Research
Lettings	Safeguarding	Allocations

## **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 Social Development. 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 Social Development.

Day to Day management of the Housing Executive is delegated to the Chief Executive (currently Acting), and five Directors. The Equality Unit comes under the management of the Director of Regional Services (through the Assistant Director, Strategic Planning).

The Housing Executive has its headquarters in Belfast. The organisation delivers its mainstream customer services through a network of 3 Regional Offices, 36 Local Outlets and 6 Grants 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 Inter Community Network
- The Consultative Forum on Equality
- The Disability Forum
- The Rural Forum

## 7.0 Previous Measures

Outlined below are 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
- Interim Accessible Housing Register

## 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:

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Title: Equality Unit Manager

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Belfast, BT2 8PB

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Website: [www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk)

The availability of the Disability Action Plan will be advertised widely including using disability associated media, and can be accessed on the Housing Executive's website (web address above).

The Housing Executive will, through our ongoing work with people with disabilities and people with learning disabilities find appropriate ways of communicating the Plan. The Plan will be produced in clear print and plain language, will be available in alternative formats on request including, large print, Daisy, Braille, audio-cassette and computer disc. Consideration will be given for requests to translate the Plan for people who speak a minority language.

The Plan will be highlighted through press releases, mail shots, advertisements and by meeting directly with disability organisations and representative groups.

In addition, all employees will be linked to an electronic copy of the Plan and will be provided with a paper copy on request.

## **8.2 Proposed Measures**

The measures which we propose to take over the period of this revised Disability Action Plan from June 2015 to May 2020 are outlined in Appendix 1, together with performance indicators and targets.

The Housing Executive is committed to monitoring and reviewing policies and practices to ensure that 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.

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.

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. The Disability Action Plan will be a standing item on the Consultative Forum on Equality to facilitate both review of progress and the introduction of new actions on a quarterly or annual basis.

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. The Equality Unit Manager will also attend the Disability Forum on a regular basis to provide an update on progress with regard to fulfilling the actions set out in the action plan.

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 methods we will use to meet these targets are set out in Appendix 1.

## APPENDIX 1: Proposed Measures

<b>Objective 1</b>		
<b>TRAINING: Mandatory Action</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/target</b>
<p>Training on general Disability Equality Awareness delivered to all Staff including Board members and new recruits as part of the induction process.</p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promoting equality of opportunity;</li> <li>• eliminating discrimination;</li> <li>• eliminating harassment;</li> <li>• encouraging participation in public life; and</li> <li>• steps to meet the needs of disabled people.</li> </ul> <p>Training will be ongoing, relevant and updated to take into consideration amendments and new inclusions to the DDA as required.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>March 2016</p>	<p>All staff trained by March 2016</p> <p>Disability Awareness Training delivered generally with 10 sessions annually.</p> <p>Equality (including disability) training will be assessed using the staff attitudes survey with a report to the Disability Forum by March 2017.</p>
<b>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Equality Unit</b>		



<b>Objective 2</b>		
<b>POSITIVE ATTITUDES</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/target</b>
Measures to promote positive attitudes amongst employees, office holders and others.	March 2018	Disability Forum to complete a review of Equality Awareness Training.
<b>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Equality Unit/Disability Forum</b>		
Measures which encourage others to adopt / promote attitudes towards disabled people.	September 2015	NIHE will establish a Regional Disability Hate Floating support service (subject to approvals).
	Annually	The Disability Forum will invite the service provider to provide updates and reports on an annual basis.
<b>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Supporting People</b>		
Measures which encourage others to adopt / promote attitudes towards disabled people.	March 2016	NIHE, in partnership with the Disability Forum, will examine the development of a Disability Relations Charter for Community Groups.
	March 2017	Disability Forum will take the lead in marketing the Charter to Community Groups with an aim of gaining a 90% uptake by HCN groups.
<b>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Disability Forum/Equality Unit/ Landlord Community Involvement</b>		
To raise awareness of people with autism	July 2015	NIHE will produce briefing for staff on the 2011 Autism Act.
	March 2016	Autism awareness training will be incorporated into training for staff.
<b>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Equality Unit</b>		

**Objective 3****ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION**

<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/target</b>
<p>Encourage disabled people to apply for or participate in public life positions.</p> <p>Remove barriers to the selection process.</p>	<p>March 2017</p>	<p>NIHE to review Disability Forum to ensure geographical spread and pan disability representation.</p>

**KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Equality Unit/Landlord Community Involvement****Objective 4****COMMUNICATION**

<p>Disabled people have a right to receive communication in the media they understand.</p>	<p>March 2017</p> <p>March 2017</p>	<p>NIHE will develop a method of addressing customer preferred mode of communication e.g. large print. Braille, email etc.</p> <p>Information on provision of alternative forms of communication marketed to customers.</p>
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**KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Equality Unit**

<p>Improving access to NIHE services.</p>	<p>December 2015</p> <p>March 2016</p>	<p>NIHE to examine development of a video-link service at front line outlets for people requiring a Sign Language Interpreter.</p> <p>Pilot of video-link in Belfast subject to feasibility.</p>
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**KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Equality Unit/ I.T. Department**

**Objective 5****OTHER AREAS**

Inter-Departmental Review of Adaptations (IDR)	TBC	Develop a cohesive action plan to address regional waiting lists for wheelchair standard housing and provide a report on space standards.
	TBC	Develop a good practice guide for design features for people with sight loss and dementia.

**KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Adaptations Policy Unit**

Accessible Housing Register (AHR)	March 2016	<p>An AHR is an information and planning tool to enable housing authorities to identify specific properties that may meet the needs of particular groups of applicants on the waiting list.</p> <p>Landlord Services to implement and evaluate the interim AHR in collaboration with Regional Services.</p> <p>Regional Services to investigate a range of Accessible Housing Register (AHR) software packages, which will interface with NIHE, Housing Associations and will work towards inclusion of the Private Sector in the future</p>
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**KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Adaptations Policy Unit**

Design Standards Toolkit	March 2016	Expand the Design Standards Toolkit Occupational Therapy specification for new build housing scenarios.
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<b>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Adaptations Policy Unit</b>		
Community Safety	Ongoing	NIHE to continue to be represented on DOJ Hate Crime Delivery Group.
	April 2016	NIHE to produce a hate crime policy and tool kit which includes issues of disability.
	December 2015	NIHE to report to Disability Forum on the measures taken to advise people with disabilities about the reporting of hate crime and hate incidents.
<b>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Community Safety Unit</b>		
Community Safety Community Relations Community Development Community Planning Housing Services Research Adaptations Planning Rural Housing	April 2018	Disability Forum to issue invites to Key Service Managers to discuss aspects of disability and the role and function of housing people with disabilities.
<b>KEY DELIVERY AGENT: Disability Forum.</b>		