

## **Beyond Good Intentions**

**A resource for local authorities  
implementing the Disability  
Equality Duty**





**Produced by the Office of Public Management (OPM) in conjunction  
with the Disability Rights Commission**

## **Foreword**

**We all want to live in communities where we can participate fully and equally. We all want our buildings, streets and spaces to be well-designed, safe places. We all want to be able to use services and facilities within our neighbourhoods and town centres and not be excluded. We know that for many disabled people this has not yet happened and there remains considerable work to be done to reach this objective.**

**To ensure that we do so we have the Disability Equality Duty (DED) for the public sector. This new legal duty will mean that any public body must look at ways of ensuring that disabled people are treated equally. A similar duty was introduced on race equality a couple of years ago.**

**This new law requires local authorities to be proactive in ensuring that disabled people are treated fairly.**

**However, this duty is not necessarily about changes to buildings or adjustments for individuals. Other parts of the Disability Discrimination Act have always dealt with these areas. What it is about is weaving equality for disabled people into the culture of public authorities in practical and demonstrable ways. This means including disabled people and disability equality in policy development and actions from the outset, rather than focusing on individualised responses to specific disabled people. It is about planning for equality right at the beginning, rather than trying to add it on at the end.**

**It will not only improve your performance on disability equality, but will help you to meet your wider objectives and strategic priorities.**

**Bert Massie  
DRC Chairman**

## **About this resource**

**This resource is the result of a year-long project that involved working with a wide range of local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland between September 2005 and August 2006. Following a national survey of authorities, we chose six as ‘champions’ to work on the practical aspects of developing a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) and Action Plan and share what they learned about the challenges and possibilities of producing realistic schemes and plans.**

**We selected authorities representative of the ‘average’ authority in order to demonstrate the real challenges of making the changes necessary to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and not just those who demonstrated good practice. However, we have included some examples of good practice where we think they offer particular insights into overcoming specific challenges.**

**The examples included in this document have been anonymised, but are drawn from the experiences of both the champion authorities and other councils who generously gave their time to participate in the research for this project – a full list can be found at the end of this document.**

**Each pilot authority received practical support and guidance towards the production of their own Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan and, in addition, agreed to host some form of local launch event and act as a champion for the duty, either within their country or region or with similar authorities. It is hoped that these real and practical examples will offer some ideas to other local authorities as they start to produce their own Disability Equality Schemes and Action Plans in December 2006.**

**The project was commissioned by the DRC and carried out by Office for Public Management (OPM) – see [www.opm.co.uk](http://www.opm.co.uk) for more information. The team was led by Tim Whitworth and included Phil Copestake, Julie Fenner, Gordon Duff, Claire Cowley, Stefan Cantore, Hannah Carnell, Kate Willcocks, Ruth Grier, Farooq Malik, Hannah Roscoe, Sophie Ahmad and Jennifer Havinden. We hope that you find this resource useful, and would like to thank all of the authorities who contributed.**

## **Disability Equality Duty national champions**

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has identified a number of national champions for the implementation of the Disability Equality Duty (DED) within local government, including John Schultz, President of SOLACE, and Lucy de Groot, Executive Director of the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). Both John and Lucy are fully committed to the DED and encourage local authorities to positively engage with this new opportunity.

‘The Disability Equality Duty is about more than ramps and schemes. It is about changing the culture, so that the needs of disabled people are addressed as a matter of course. Changing the culture is something chief executives must take responsibility for.’

**John Schultz, President of SOLACE**

‘Leadership is vital to the success of local government, and never more so than when working towards disability equality. Leaders at all levels in councils can make a positive difference to the life chances and experiences of disabled people, as citizens, service users and employees. Involving disabled people in the design and delivery of public services means that those services are not just appropriate for disabled people themselves, but are actually more accessible to all. As model employers, councils have the opportunity to lead by example by giving disabled people an equal chance of joining their workforce, and making sure they reach their full potential as council employees. But councils’ responsibility goes beyond being good employers and service providers. Councils are first and foremost democratic institutions and they have a responsibility to help disabled people to participate in public life, so that their needs and aspirations are properly represented in the political process. For all these reasons, promoting disability equality should be at the heart of local government.’

**Lucy de Groot, Executive Director, IDeA**

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# Overview

## Introduction

The purpose of this resource is to provide practical guidance and pointers for:

- decision makers at elected member and director/senior management level
- senior managers responsible for corporate policy, social inclusion and equalities

in all local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland seeking to implement the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector contained in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (the DDA), as amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. Regulations made under the DDA require the production of a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) including an Action Plan by the 4 of December 2006, and the carrying out of these actions.

This new legal duty will mean that any public body will need to look at ways of actively ensuring that disabled people are treated equally. The duty is not necessarily about changes to buildings or adjustments for individuals, it's all about including equality for disabled people into the culture of public authorities in practical and demonstrable ways. This means incorporating disability equality into everything from the outset, rather than responding to the needs of specific disabled groups.

The duty looks not only at promoting equality and eliminating discrimination but also at areas such as eliminating harassment, encouraging participation in public life and promoting positive attitudes.

Local authorities need to focus on what outcomes they want to achieve with this duty, what success will look like, what their particular responsibilities are and how they will know they're making progress –and break this down into manageable stages.

The Disability Equality Duty requires local authorities to have due regard to:

- eliminating discrimination
- promoting equality of opportunity
- eliminating harassment
- encouraging participation of disabled people in public life
- promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.

The Disability Equality Scheme (DES) sets out a structure for achieving outcomes, including involving disabled people, gathering evidence, producing action plans and arranging for impact assessments. A summary of the requirements of the disability equality duty is set out in a quick-read guide, 'Doing the Duty'.<sup>1</sup> Detailed information is available in the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) Statutory Codes of Practice.<sup>2</sup>

This resource is the result of a project in England, Wales and Scotland examining how local authorities are tackling implementation of the Disability Equality Duty. For more detail about the project, and how this resource was put together, please see the 'About this Resource' section at the beginning.

The DRC has set out four steps in the successful implementation of a Scheme:

1. Involving disabled people
2. Mapping and information gathering
3. Action planning
4. Assessing the impact of policies and activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) 'Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector', [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

<sup>2</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) 'Statutory Code of Practice, the Duty to Promote Disability Equality' The code for England and Wales, and the equivalent code for Scotland are available at [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)

**We have added one further step in this resource: Mainstreaming, in order to provide a focus on actions that are sustainable both internally (within an authority) and externally (working with other organisations). The pages that follow are structured in a series of five steps/themes.**

**The Disability Rights Commission is urging local authorities to not just produce another ‘strategy’ – good intentions that sit on the shelf and are never implemented – but to create a DES and Action Plan that is realistic and manageable.**

**The case studies included in this document are of two types. Some illustrate ‘effective practice examples’ of initiatives designed to contribute to successful and realistic Disability Equality Schemes and Action Plans. Others offer suggestions for future success from a number of examples of over-ambitious, unrealistic or less than successful initiatives. Most of the case studies include elements of both success and challenge.**

**Each authority’s situation is unique and we have resisted organising the resource into a series of potential solutions and case studies that match needs and problems. The experience of authorities we have surveyed is that realistic, meaningful and sustainable approaches to improve access – to services, opportunities and buildings – must be based on an honest assessment of what is not happening now. This should be followed by a step-by-step approach to making changes that are owned and informed by people with personal or professional experience of disability. An ‘off-the-shelf’ solution will compound what is already not working.**

**The summary that follows highlights the key themes and messages that you may want to bear in mind when producing your Scheme and Action Plan. These are linked in each case to real-life examples and case studies in the other sections.**

## Summary

We have found the most useful examples of effective implementation of the duty have come through understanding the real difficulties of ensuring equality of access to all – the personal, organisational and societal blocks and challenges – and then working together with people to begin to shift those blocks and challenges. ‘Able Authorities’, the report commissioned by the Department of Communities and Local Government into the implementation of the DDA in England found little evidence of good, consistent or replicable practice in improving access other than providing ramps and handrails, and found that there is still a long way to go in making these changes. <sup>3</sup>

Most non-disabled people really have no idea what it is like to be disabled and this is as true of unseen impairments as visible ones.

How then can we:

- plan or improve services?
- carry out an impact assessment?
- realistically measure improvements to disabled people’s lives?

The experience from our work shows that there are four very simple ingredients for developing a realistic DES capable of successful implementation:

- Honesty – acknowledging that it is difficult
- Genuine involvement – getting people with personal experience of disability to assist in designing the changes
- Realism – recognising that it will take time – and producing a challenging strategic plan as a framework for this

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<sup>3</sup> Barnes et al (2006) ‘Able Authorities? The Disability Discrimination Act, disabled people and local authorities in England’, Institute of Local Social Studies, Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham, Department of Communities and Local Government, [www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1501795](http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1501795)

- **Practicality – making small changes and learning from these before making the next change.**

**The pages that follow summarise the key issues under each of the five steps or elements of a sustainable Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan.**

- 1. Involvement**
- 2. Information**
- 3a. Mainstreaming and sustainability – internal**
- 3b. Mainstreaming and sustainability – external**
- 4. Assessment, monitoring and evaluation**
- 5. Action planning**

## **The five steps**

### **Step 1: Involvement**

The involvement of disabled people is central to creating a Disability Equality Scheme and is also a statutory requirement of the Disability Equality Duty. Involvement of disabled people is not just a requirement but should bring immense benefit and expertise to a local authority's DES. Nevertheless, at times, ensuring effective and meaningful involvement can be challenging for both local authorities and disabled people themselves.<sup>4</sup> Involvement should not be confused with consultation. This duty requires a much more active engagement of disabled stakeholders at all stages than is implied by the term 'consultation'.

The following are the main themes around involvement emerging from OPM's work with local authorities.

#### **Involve disabled people from the outset**

One central equalities team in a local authority spent several years trying to identify how to get members, management and staff to address issues raised by the Disability Discrimination Act. They did not wish to 'air their dirty linen in public', so they did not:

- work with local disability organisations in the voluntary and community sector
- face up to critical service users, or
- acknowledge their own difficulties with partner organisations such as the Primary Care Trust (PCT) or Local Mental Health Trust.

They were making little progress in developing a Scheme, so they set about holding a series of meetings with the umbrella local disability organisation and local disabled people. 'It was less painful than we imagined – we realised that we lost over a year in planning our

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<sup>4</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) 'Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector', [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

scheme – just asking people with personal experience what would make a difference, what was really important and how we, together, could set about it really provided the key....’

### **Avoid ‘consultation/involvement fatigue’**

While every public authority is expected to consult on planned services in a wider context, and on whether these services are effective, they often find it difficult to involve people because many vulnerable or disadvantaged groups of people complain of being consulted about public services at every turn but with very little impact. But for local authorities the DED specifically requires the involvement of disabled people. Working through your local strategic partnership, health and social care forum or crime and disorder reduction partnership to achieve a joined-up approach can reduce the separate involvement activities that each individual partner undertakes. This offers benefits in reduced costs of involvement, more joined-up information on service users’ needs and a reduced risk of solely relying on ‘the usual suspects’.

### **Should you involve users or just provide information to them?**

If your organisation is serious about involving users, and is clear about the benefits of doing so and is not just ‘ticking the box’, you will want to set out a clear involvement strategy – taking account of the particular challenges in involving and engaging disabled people.

### **Delivering public services that make a difference to people’s lives**

Governments in the respective countries are committed to finding out whether public services really make a difference to people’s lives in health and social care, education and housing. In England, for example, new inspection rules for watchdogs such as the Audit Commission and Healthcare Commission mean that they will be asking your service users whether what you do actually works – no longer will they just look at what your records say you are doing. This is the biggest change contained within the Audit Commission’s ‘Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2005 – Meeting the

**Harder Test’.<sup>5</sup> In Wales and Scotland, National Audit Office Wales and Audit Scotland respectively require local authorities to demonstrate that they are working effectively in partnership with relevant organisations and service user representatives.**

**You can transform your services and work more efficiently by involving users, particularly disabled people, in the design and checking of what you do. You will need to:**

- Put yourself in their shoes – why should a disabled person turn out to listen to you speak when they have been struggling all day with inaccessible transport, inadequate support or a hostile environment?**
- Design events that are attractive for users to attend – in the right place at the right time.**
- Work with your partners, such as health trusts, to avoid duplication of consultation.**
- Build on your new relationships to involve disabled people and their carers in working groups – perhaps to advise on a new service or to employ someone.**
- Value the input of disabled users – they are the ‘experts’. Are you providing adequate recompense for their time and knowledge?**
- Find ways of really listening to people’s stories – they will often lead you to discover simple solutions and savings.**
- Avoid dominance of your involvement processes by the usual suspects if you believe that this puts off other people who may have experiences to share – you may need a separate process for these ‘harder-to-involve’ disabled users.**
- Recognise that it all takes time – you will not get a quick fix but you might get a smart long-lasting solution.**

**Remember: getting the right level of involvement for your disabled service users will help you meet your targets.**

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<sup>5</sup> **Audit Commission (2005) ‘Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2005 – Meeting the Harder Test’, [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)**

**To explore detailed examples of involvement activity and the challenges faced by authorities, go to section 1. Involvement.**

## **Step 2: Information**

In order to develop a DES, local authorities need to have an idea of how they are currently performing on disability equality. This can be achieved through mapping current performance and identifying where the council is performing well and where there is room for future improvements.<sup>6</sup> Mapping what is being done already and what the real needs of disabled people are is a first step to the production of a realistic scheme.

The following are some of the main themes emerging from OPM's work with local authorities:

### **Go to where the people are**

Information gathering that involves home visits or going to where disabled people use services is more likely to convey the message that you are interested than only using methods that involve people having to come to you. For example, one authority set about this by asking people in shopping centres about their experiences of the authority's services. Another made arrangements to discuss experiences with disabled users in their homes.

### **Test out whether your perceptions of access meet those of disabled people**

For example, one authority found that disabled people believed a service was not accessible when in reality it was. In another example, an authority discovered that sophisticated and expensive arrangements for access were not what people wanted, but that they did need other simpler changes.

### **Develop awareness**

For example, one authority set out to 'kitemark' services as inclusive. Although the outcome was expected to be the award of kitemarks, the process of working with managers and users served as an evidence-gathering exercise, with visits flagging up issues leading to Action

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<sup>6</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) 'Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector', [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

Plans to address these.

### **Make sure that information is what people need**

The emphasis should be on ‘making publications and resources available to all who need them in their preferred format’, rather than on producing ‘every document in every conceivable format’. By producing a directory of accessible formats, a council was able to target their efforts to achieve the former objective.

### **Get buy-in from service managers**

One of the examples in this resource describes how an authority realised that it was making little progress in getting information on disabled users and potential users from managers because the services would demonstrate poor performance and access. They used the ‘safe space’ created by action learning sets across the authority where managers could share experiences and challenges, and felt comfortable in acknowledging that their information gathering could be improved.

### **Involve disabled people in priority setting**

For example, one authority established work placements where local disabled people were supported and employed in training positions and took part in assessing priorities for service changes and improvements. This not only informed a more realistic approach to the changes, it also gave positive messages to the community and to the potential for the employment of disabled people.

### **Adopt a person-centred approach to joint equalities planning**

The challenge of producing separate Action Plans for a number of equalities areas is exercising many authorities. Some are adopting a strategic, joined-up single equalities approach with individual service departments and partners. However, to be meaningful to individuals in the community, it must be based on a person centred approach and carefully filtered through the involvement of disabled people. The Disability Rights Commission is concerned that such schemes all too often result in only a superficial consideration of each distinctive experience of equality, as well as failing to comply with the distinctive

**legal requirements of the three duties.<sup>7</sup>**

**To explore detailed examples of information activity and the challenges faced by authorities see section 2. Information.**

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<sup>7</sup> See the DRC's position on single equality schemes at [www.drc.org.uk/employers\\_and\\_service\\_provider/disability\\_equality\\_duty/getting\\_started/doing\\_the\\_duty.aspx](http://www.drc.org.uk/employers_and_service_provider/disability_equality_duty/getting_started/doing_the_duty.aspx)

## **Step 3a: Mainstreaming and sustainability – internal**

It is important to ensure that the Disability Equality Scheme demonstrates commitment at the very highest level of an authority and the DRC strongly recommends that the introduction should have the endorsement of and be signed by the Chief Executive or their equivalent. Another factor that may be helpful in ensuring the implementation of the DES is having a senior officer to take responsibility for the implementation of the duty and the Scheme – the involvement of officers throughout the process of developing and implementing a DES cannot be overstated. Having someone with disability expertise to advise and co-ordinate would also be beneficial. The following examples show how different authorities have mainstreamed their DES and ensured their sustainability.<sup>8</sup>

Improving access to services and facilities will achieve little if these changes cannot be sustained. Often, this is a result of not identifying the business case, getting poor buy-in from managers and staff or the high costs of maintaining effective access.

The following are some of the main themes emerging from OPM's work with local authorities:

### **Use equalities champions**

One of the most consistent marks of success is the consistent identification and use of equalities champions – whether these are selected from elected members, senior management or senior departmental staff. It really makes a difference if a champion is someone with a personal or professional experience of disability. For example, one authority described here made real strides once it established a corporate equalities group with membership (and ownership) at the right level of seniority. The impact that champions can have is reflected in the DRC's own use of national champions – including those that have endorsed this resource.

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<sup>8</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) 'Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector', [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

## **Draw in disabled people from outside**

If you cannot identify powerful internal champions, then recruit or co-opt disabled service users or residents – either as consultants or advisors. Use them to support disability equality training run by disabled trainers or use individuals attached to a disability equality forum as part of the scrutiny function. But be very clear about this relationship and appropriate recompense.

## **Make disability equality training part of mainstream activity – and not just a bolted-on activity**

One equalities officer who described their experiences for this resource ran short disability equality sessions as part of team meetings across the authority, leading to better ‘low-level’ awareness and improved take up and attention levels on discrete disability awareness training sessions.

## **Disabled people are voters**

Do elected members realise that, in many areas of the country, disabled people make up 20 per cent of their potential voters? Projects that have involved members listening to and working with local disabled people have demonstrated improved satisfaction levels with council services.

To explore detailed examples of this kind of mainstreaming activity see section 3a. Mainstreaming and sustainability – internal.

## **Step 3b: Mainstreaming and sustainability – external**

In addition to ensuring the duty is mainstreamed and sustainable within each local authority, it is also necessary to ensure this is the case with external partners and stakeholders. No organisation operates in a vacuum and the success of a DES will be dependent to some extent on partner organisations.<sup>9</sup>

A consistent message throughout the survey undertaken at the beginning of this project was that local authorities could not achieve effective implementation of a successful Disability Equality Scheme on their own. This means that they need the support and involvement of partner organisations, the voluntary and community sector and organisations of disabled people as well as individual disabled people. Building a sustainable approach to disability equality in this way can bring major improvements in other measures such as general assessment ratings on being able to identify and measure the impact of services.

The following are some of the main themes emerging from OPM's work with local authorities:

### **Stakeholder events**

Events that bring together public service organisations with the community to identify and achieve consensus on priorities have proved successful in planning and reviewing targeted improvements. Such events should not, however, be the sole focus of involvement.

### **Joining up and sharing resources**

By making explicit links between its disability partnership board and the local strategic partnership, one local authority worked with its local health trust or board and other partners on information, review and action planning.

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<sup>9</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) 'Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector', [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

## **Sharing training**

Sharing training across partnerships brings better partnership working as well as reducing costs.

## **Capacity building**

Particularly in voluntary and community sector organisations working with disabled people, capacity building brings greater levels of community connection and provides better value for money in the delivery of certain functions. Examples include employing disabled people in voluntary and community sector organisations in scrutiny functions through activities such as mystery shopping or developing information or support networks in the community.

To explore detailed examples of this kind of mainstreaming activity see section 3b. Mainstreaming and sustainability – external and partnerships.

## **Step 4: Assessment, monitoring and evaluation**

Local authorities need to set out how they will undertake disability equality impact assessments with a view to embedding their DES. The objective of these assessments will be to ensure that a council's activities do not disadvantage disabled people (whether this is intentional or not). Additionally, impact assessments will gather evidence and identify where councils can promote equality of opportunity. The council should address any gaps in policies or adverse effects.<sup>10</sup>

Knowing that the public service provided makes a difference to and improves people's lives is at the heart of 'CPA 2005: The Harder Test', and in England, all authorities will be expected to be able to demonstrate this monitoring in future Audit Commission inspections.<sup>11</sup> Simply producing a description of the processes adopted in delivering services and the structures in place will not be adequate. On the contrary, service users themselves will be asked what the impact of the service has been for them. Welsh and Scottish authorities who go down the path of involving disabled users in evaluating the effectiveness of services will be contributing to gaining satisfactory partnership working inspection reports. These requirements sit neatly with the expectations of a Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan – and effective mechanisms to evaluate progress and achievements and learn from targets not achieved will become an essential part of the cycle of improvement.

The following are some of the main themes emerging from OPM's work with local authorities:

### **Develop effective communications with service departments**

Unless there is a two-way communication system in place, churning out potential solutions to perceived ineffective services or policies tells us little about whether the improvements made any difference.

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<sup>10</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) 'Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector', [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

<sup>11</sup> Audit Commission (2005) 'Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2005 – Meeting the Harder Test', [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

## **Simple structures for evaluation**

Simple structures are more likely to be understood and be effective. The use of disability equality impact assessments as a way of making staff think carefully about current practice does not in itself make for change, but it does raise awareness of where improvement may be made and prompts action on these improvements.

## **Involve disabled people in scrutiny and evaluation processes**

This can create meaning and change: through this process one authority discovered that its biggest challenge lay in ineffective communications and was able to divert resources to this area.

## **Honesty and humility**

Even though targets may not always be met, open discussion with stakeholders on why they were not helps to create improvement and transparency. For example, one large authority uses a variety of mechanisms, including a citizens' jury made up of disabled people, an annual stakeholders event and mystery shoppers with personal experience of disability as external groups to not only assess priorities but to gather evidence and evaluate achievement.

## **Take steps to reduce the 'fear' around assessment**

In the case of one authority, concern about 'getting it wrong' with regard to impact assessments was stopping any progress being made. The authority introduced a simple training programme and a variety of other measures to highlight the benefits arising from a process that could be simple and non-threatening.

To explore detailed examples of assessment, monitoring and evaluation activity see section 4. Assessment, monitoring and evaluation.

## **Step 5: Action planning**

An essential part of any DES is the process of action planning. The DRC urges caution with an overarching equality scheme and action plans and suggests that if this approach is taken, separate and distinct arrangements for gathering evidence around disability equality and involving disabled people are included, along with separate action plans for all strands. This might be across individual directorate / service areas or across the different equalities strands.<sup>12</sup> If taking a unified approach, it will be helpful to ‘level up’ across all equalities areas. The DRC recommends that in order to ensure an effective and coordinated approach across the duties, you adopt the highest standard from each duty (for example taking the precedent from the DED in relation to involvement and applying this to both race and gender) across all equality areas you are covering in your scheme

The Action Plan should incorporate a number of elements, including the priorities of disabled people (shaped by the involvement of disabled people), the priorities of the council, and specific outcomes which the authority wishes to achieve set against a realistic timetable.<sup>13</sup>

Creating a realistic Action Plan that is genuinely owned, that is understandable and, crucially, that is deliverable is at the heart of what the production of a DES is about. There have been many examples of action plans for improvements in equalities in the public sector over many years that have met none of these requirements.

The following are some of the main themes emerging from OPM’s work with local authorities:

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<sup>12</sup> See the DRC’s position on single equality schemes at [www.drc.org.uk/employers\\_and\\_service\\_provider/disability\\_equality\\_duty/getting\\_started/doing\\_the\\_duty.aspx](http://www.drc.org.uk/employers_and_service_provider/disability_equality_duty/getting_started/doing_the_duty.aspx)

<sup>13</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) ‘Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector’, [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

## **Make delivery, not the plan, the focus for activity**

Highly performance managed and target driven authorities, keen to meet what they perceive as the requirements of improved service standards in order to achieve good CPA scores, can produce very detailed strategies and plans and the procedures and protocols that go with these. Broad based targets and strategies are difficult to implement and more difficult to measure.

## **An Action Plan will not change things on its own**

There is a temptation to produce an overarching and substantive Action Plan as this demonstrates effectiveness and fitness for purpose. Senior managers responsible for equalities and equalities officers often become convinced that its very existence will produce actions – the most effective Action Plans contain realistic, often small scale specific actions with challenging but not unrealistic targets

## **Race equality Action Plans are not the same as disability equality Action Plans**

In addition to meeting the requirements of the DDA, many authorities are reviewing their race equality Action Plans and there is a temptation to use the same templates and frameworks without fully recognising some of the many distinct differences between the issues and the legislation such as:

- The Disability Discrimination Act does not restrict positive discrimination in relation to disabled people, which is distinct and unique to disability discrimination in equality law.
- The DED requires public authorities formally to involve disabled people in the development of Disability Equality Schemes. There is no such legal requirement in the Race Equality Duties.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See the DRC's position on single equality schemes at [www.drc.org.uk/employers\\_and\\_service\\_provider/disability\\_equality\\_duty/getting\\_started/doing\\_the\\_duty.aspx](http://www.drc.org.uk/employers_and_service_provider/disability_equality_duty/getting_started/doing_the_duty.aspx).

## **Involve organisations and individuals with personal experience of disability in co-creating solutions to local needs**

This can produce realistic and measurable outcomes – for example, one authority ‘dug deep’ and commissioned a short film scripted and featuring local disabled people and used the outcomes to inform its Community Strategy and Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan.

## **Use of ‘Scenario Building’ action-planning events**

One authority that was interviewed for this resource organised events involving small focus groups made up from a range of service users and experienced facilitators. The focus of the session was to create an informal, creative environment in which service users were encouraged to describe their ideal outcomes relating to disability equality, projecting five years into the future.

## **Ensure those delivering the actions are involved in designing them**

It essential that senior management within relevant teams have a significant role in identifying actions for their specific areas. One authority produced a range of actions with no involvement of relevant senior management. These actions were quite rightly informed by the involvement of disabled people but were designed by equalities staff. Without the significant involvement of the senior management whose teams will have to deliver the actions their chance of success was very limited.

Directorate or team based action plans can be very helpful in producing realistic and deliverable actions and outcomes.

To explore detailed examples of action planning activity, see section 5. Action planning.

# 1. Involvement

The involvement of disabled people is central to creating a Disability Equality Scheme and is also a requirement of the Disability Equality Duty. Involvement of disabled people is not just a requirement but should bring immense benefit and expertise to a local authority's DES. Nevertheless, at times, ensuring effective and meaningful involvement for both local authorities and disabled people can be challenging.<sup>15</sup> The following are specific examples of how local authorities have tackled involvement, based on the real-life experiences of the councils we worked with during this project.

## Engaging strategic decision-makers in involvement

### Context and objectives

A council in England covering a diverse urban area was looking at the reality of the implementation of the 'Valuing People White Paper' in the lives of a representative group of people with a learning disability and their families. Specifically they:

- evaluated and monitored the work done with the families
- identified good practice and problems
- reported findings to the board and helped to identify operational and strategic issues
- brought strategic decision makers into direct contact with people who use the services and their families on a regular basis and vice versa
- monitored outcomes of the work.

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<sup>15</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) 'Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector', [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

## **Process and approach**

The project involved a representative group of people with a range of needs, complexity, and independence, who also reflected the multi-cultural nature of the community. Participants' families, staff and board members were also involved.

Each member of the group was linked with a board member, who helped him or her to complete a 'person centred plan'. The work done through this process was reported back to the board. The service users and their families attended the board meeting and had lunch with the board members. They then worked together in a workshop on the planning that had previously been done. Individual outcomes were identified, the information aggregated and strategic issues highlighted.

## **Outcomes and learning**

All participants in the project found it helpful and were committed to its objectives. However, the most difficult aspect of the process was being able to get everyone together. Different members of the group had time demands and the organisers tried arranging meetings during the day, the evening and at weekends. None of these proved to be successful and so the council ended up getting as many people together as they could and then trying to facilitate communication between all participants.

## **Avoiding consultation fatigue**

### **Context and objectives**

In the face of widespread 'consultation fatigue', a large council in an urban area embarked on a time-saving method for involving disabled people in the development of their DES. The local disability forum and various community groups were unwilling to duplicate information that had previously been provided to the council. So instead, the council decided to draft an outline of their DES using relevant information accumulated recently from disability organisations and disabled people, and channel involvement efforts towards gaining feedback and making amendments.

## **Process and approach**

Information was accumulated from all recent engagement activity with disability organisations, with particular emphasis on a recent thorough engagement exercise used to inform a disability conference the year before. Once a draft basic outline of their DES had been drawn up, various methods were used to ensure that feedback was received from as wide a cross-section of disabled people as possible. Presentations were given to disabled council employee networks within the council, and the community empowerment umbrella network disseminated draft copies to different community groups. It was harder to reach disabled individuals who were not part of the groups, particularly those with learning disabilities, who needed to receive the draft DES in a suitable format. Efforts were made to welcome all constructive feedback in various formats to suit each individual.

## **Outcomes and learning**

Good quality feedback was received from across the disability networks targeted, and alterations were made to the draft DES as a result. For example, it was felt to be too long and too repetitive, so the next draft was shortened. Sections that were felt to be missing, for example on transportation and how the council encourages disabled employees, were also included. Informal reports from those involved in the process suggest that the avoidance of frustration stemming from repetition of what had (only recently) been done before led to an increased willingness to provide constructive feedback.

Whilst the DRC would always recommend involving disabled people from the outset this was clearly a pragmatic solution where there had been considerable recent involvement of disabled people that could be utilised for the initial development of the DES.

## **Large involvement conference**

### **Context and objectives**

A local authority in Wales held a conference in October last year called 'Reaching Out'. The aim was to examine how disabled people could get involved in developing the DES and other areas of disability and equality. It was a large-scale forum designed to consider the

needs and wishes of disabled people – and those who work with them.

## **Process and approach**

The conference was broadcast live over the internet, and was on the authority's website for a period of six months following that. A mixture of people were invited: disabled people themselves – identified through various databases – and all the members of a local disability forum. Organisations that represent disabled people were also invited. They sent information out to community services departments and social services so that they could then send invitations to the disabled people they were in contact with. Adverts were also placed in the local paper.

## **Outcomes and learning**

Finding an accessible venue was a challenge at first, but in the end the conference was held in a local sports centre. The authority is split into three different areas, and so the organisers decided to hold a conference in a different area every couple of years in order to make it as accessible to as many people as possible. The plan for the future is to use a suitable public building in each area.

Those attending the conference gave examples of how the council could involve more people in the development of the DES – the most striking thought to come out of the day was that the people they should involve are those who do not usually come. As a result, the organisers are planning lots of new techniques to involve disabled people – for example, web-based processes are to be developed. This highlights the need for a variety of methods to be made available to facilitate involvement at a range of levels with the widest group of people possible.

## **Involvement at strategic level**

### **Context and objectives**

The last six months in this authority have seen a growing awareness of the work that needs to be done, and of its responsibility in relation to disability equality. This has resulted in briefings for the executive management team and the performance champions group as well as heads of service.

Accordingly the authority has developed a number of structures to facilitate the involvement of disabled people. While there have been focus groups for a while; work has begun with a local deaf partnership on the equalities duty to enhance involvement. There have also been discussions with the wider community to explore whether disabled people know their rights and to get their input into the DES. There is also another group on visual impairment. The main forum for involvement is the Disability Advisory Group (DAG), which works across the council with officers to improve access, and is key to ensuring disability equality issues are addressed across the council's business.

### **Process and approach**

The DAG comprises six disabled people and those representing key agencies linked to the lives of disabled people including people from housing and other key areas. The chair is on the local strategic partnership and therefore feeds into the council and local partners' planning at the strategic level.

A major challenge has been the capacity to deliver on this agenda. Another issue is capacity building; supporting disabled people to be involved, but recognising that not all people know about the social model of disability. The chair of the DAG is well known in the disability world – she is experienced and aware of the modern jargon, but there is a feeling that the rest of the group should also be equipped to develop a common understanding of the social model of disability.

### **Outcomes and learning**

While the DAG has had and is having an effect on internal and external 'mainstreaming' there is no real joined-up approach at this point. There has been some joint work with partners – such as through the deaf partnership board working with the police on access to police stations. There have also been some projects linked to partners and the focus groups but the council still has work to do and this will take time. The mechanisms to consult and affect decision making need to be strengthened so that effective involvement of disabled people becomes normal.

## **The ‘world-café’ approach to involvement events**

### **Context and objectives**

A large urban council wanted to raise awareness of the development of the DES, recruit from a wide range of stakeholders to a working group and present the results of mystery shopping undertaken by a local disability group. To achieve these objectives, the council decided to run a planning and profile-raising engagement event.

### **Process and approach**

The design principles for the event were informed by the ‘world-café’ approach, where participants are seated informally at café tables, but the event is carefully structured. The event:

- was less formal than usual, with the result that disabled citizens were able to tell stories and be heard
- provided a framework for open negotiation between those who need services to respond in a certain way, and those who plan, manage, and deliver them to understand each others’ expectations
- assumed people with the knowledge and experience to move this agenda forward were in the room.

For examples of how this type of event has been used in a number of settings and for a range of purposes (including consultation events with disabled people) see: [www.theworldcafe.com/connections.html](http://www.theworldcafe.com/connections.html)

There was a need to plan carefully the support of people with mobility issues so that they could circulate wherever they wanted to, or to stay at tables if they did not.

The agenda for the event focused on the main themes identified at an earlier DES workshop as common aspirations. There were rounds of conversation within an overall three-hour programme, with each round addressing a new question (such as ‘what do we mean by disability equality?’), but informed by the previous round.

Members of the DES working group acted as table hosts. Their role was to make connections between what people were saying, asking

deeper questions about why progress does or does not happen and to feed back after each round, to inform the next round of conversation.

## **Outcomes and learning**

The outcomes of the event were:

- the raising of awareness about the requirements of the DES, so that disabled people know what is happening and can hold public authorities to account
- the sharing of experiences of being disabled (specifically bringing disabled citizens face to face with managers and others)
- the identification of the key priorities which seem to relate to the real world experiences of disabled people in the borough (for instance, cross-cutting issues about access or stereotypes).

## **A principled approach to involvement**

### **Context and objectives**

A large urban council in England has been developing a disabled and older people's forum. One of the main objectives of this forum is to involve those people who meet DDA criteria, but do not think of themselves as 'disabled'. In the past, it has been hard to involve a wide enough range of disabled people. As part of development of the forum the council has established a number of principles, based on its experience of involving disabled people in the past. These were developed jointly with local health trusts, who had faced similar challenges around involvement, and agreed with the council that starting with first principles would allow all the organisations to avoid mistakes of the past, and use resources more efficiently.

### **Process and approach**

Officers from the council and health trusts developed the following principles based on their previous efforts to involve disabled people. These will be used to underpin all involvement activities in the future.

The principles are:

- 1. Involvement must be based on an understanding of the social model of disability.**
- 2. Older and disabled people must be offered maximum choice in the way they get involved. Over-reliance on attending events disenfranchises a large number of older and disabled residents.**
- 3. Feedback is essential for true involvement.**
- 4. Business meetings are not attractive. Events should be 'fun'.**
- 5. People will get involved only if there is something in it for them. This may be financial, but could also be a sense of purpose.**
- 6. Issues must be presented in a way that people can relate to, not in council 'jargon' or by means of long documents.**
- 7. Frequent, low-key contact is likely to foster a greater sense of relationship and involvement than occasional big events.**
- 8. Although it is essential to involve older and disabled people themselves, an additional avenue for representation could be provided by council departments and voluntary sector organisations.**

## **Outcomes and learning**

This is a joint project with the local primary care and hospital trusts, both of whom will need to demonstrate involvement as part of their own schemes. Partnership working has helped the council and the primary care and hospital trusts to overcome problems caused by their lack of resources (in terms of staff time). In this case, the council was lucky enough to be approached by the two healthcare partners themselves, but this example demonstrates the value of pooling resources and efforts around involvement.

## **Conducting research to inform priorities**

### **Context and objectives**

In order to involve disabled people in deciding the priorities of its DES, a large council conducted a research project in partnership with several local voluntary organisations. This research was carried out by face-to-face interviews between a single project worker and disabled people. The research is felt to be particularly valuable as the researcher visited people in their own homes, ensuring that she gathered a range of opinions and included people who may not naturally find themselves in the engagement process.

One of the key recommendations from the report was the need to improve the ability of disabled people to get and retain paid employment.

### **Process and approach**

As a result of this research, the council is developing a pilot scheme whereby six young disabled people (aged 16-24) will be recruited and offered workplace experience and training. The intention is to ensure that the six people chosen have a mix of learning disabilities, sensory and physical impairments. The programme for the pilot also includes careers advice and assistance with CV writing and other employment skills. Other components will be tailored to the needs of the individual young person, for example working on motivation and self-esteem as well as specific vocational and practical training. The programmes also involve a high degree of support from a dedicated training adviser.

### **Outcomes and learning**

In order for this pilot scheme to be a success, it will be necessary for the council to provide a range of diverse work placement opportunities for the people recruited. To make this a useful experience for both the trainee and the department in which the trainee is placed, the department will need disability equality training. A local voluntary organisation – who has trained a number of disabled people to deliver training in line with best practice – will provide this. Costs associated with training the young people will be met by government sponsored programmes already operated by the

council, in order to reduce the burden on the department.

## **Informal supportive involvement**

### **Context and objectives**

A council in a mainly rural area does a lot of work with a local disability association and relies heavily on it for consultation and involvement in the development of its DES. The group is made up from volunteers, a high proportion of whom are disabled themselves, an access consultant and a chair. It has been running for about 30 years – but the council has been involved with it for just under two years. The council's equalities officer was invited to give a presentation to the group on the DES development, and they are now trying to work together in taking it forward.

### **Process and approach**

The council has recently been supporting the group in designing their work programme and allocation of responsibility; and has supported drafting the agenda for their meetings, with the objective of instilling some increased management and direction into the way it works. This has helped to form some strong links with the group, and develop the informal contact which aids the involvement of disabled people.

### **Outcomes and learning**

The council and the group have decided that completing the first draft of the DES should be about taking it beyond what the law says about involving disabled people in the development: actually sharing responsibility with them so they can take ownership.

The key challenges were the usual capacity issues faced when dealing with the voluntary sector. The association is the only formal access group in the county, so the council tends to consult its members frequently. As members of the association are not always able to attend meetings, this makes the nature of proper involvement quite difficult. The strategy adopted by the council to cope with this is to be sensitive and selective in order to avoid consultation fatigue.

## **Ensuring all voices are heard**

### **Context and objectives**

While involving disability organisations and disabled people who are already working with the local authorities is positive, it is also crucially important to make sure those who do not usually have the opportunity to have their say are involved. A smaller rural council has been engaging regularly throughout the development of its DES with a disability forum comprising 50 disabled members. Monthly meetings have principally served to hold the council to account for decisions made during the development of the DES. The main challenge in managing these forums has been the dominance of certain individuals pushing specific disability agendas based on personal experience. The tendency for discussions to focus predominantly on physical access issues, for example, has affected the capacity of these forums to reflect disability issues across the board.

### **Process and approach**

One of the solutions to this challenge has been to restructure the agendas through the selective division of attendees into small groups. Discussion groups consisting of four to five individuals have allowed a focus on common priority areas, with targeted discussions relating to specific issues such as hearing impairment, dual sensory impairment and local access. The addition of a final plenary session has facilitated the feedback and exchange of ideas which has enabled the equal representation of individual priority areas.

### **Outcomes and learning**

This visible display of inclusiveness is thought to be crucial for broadening knowledge and understanding across a range of disability equality areas. The dominance of the most vocal members of a reference group is a common problem that many authorities face. There has also been a challenge in preventing discussions from becoming 'unwieldy and unfocused' during these meetings. Constant reference to the outlines of the Disability Equality Duty has proved a useful method for refocusing the discussion on the relevant outcomes for the DES.

## **Community champions**

### **Context and objectives**

In an effort to 'meet the equality standard and go further', a council in the north east of England has recruited volunteers to act as 'community champions' to aid the flow of communication between the council and specific groups. An advert was placed in the council magazine – which is sent to every household in the authority's remit – inviting people with strong feelings about disability and equality issues to volunteer for the role. Copies of the advert were also recorded onto tape and distributed by the County Blind Association to ensure that a representative group could be formed.

### **Process and approach**

The small group of community champions, who meet four times a year with staff from all over the council's service units, has proved to be a great vehicle through which information can flow in both directions between disabled people and those in the council developing the DES. In an effort to foster this two-way flow of communication throughout the development of the scheme, information is both obtained and disseminated throughout the area through the community champions. Travel expenses subsidies for the volunteers have helped them to have direct contact with people living in rural areas.

### **Outcomes and learning**

A lack of publicity over the existence of the community champions has limited the extent to which the public has contacted them directly. More funding would elevate the profile of the group so that consultation and involvement could be powered from both sides. In a drive to improve involvement opportunities for the next stage of the DES development, community champions are now acting as a panel of advisors for a project to consult disabled people through an interactive website.

## **2. Information**

In order to develop a DES, local authorities need to have an idea of how they are currently performing on disability equality. This can be achieved through mapping current performance areas with regard to where the council is performing well and where there is room for future improvements.<sup>16</sup> The following are specific examples of how local authorities have tackled gathering and using information, based on the real-life experiences of the councils we worked with during this project.

### **Information mapping exercise**

#### **Context and objectives**

One of the observations of the Corporate Equalities Team in a large rural council was of a lack of any robust evidence base to support service planning which ‘mainstreams’ disability equality issues. There were also concerns about developing a common language about disability equality issues, and the need to make an honest assessment of progress.

To address these issues, an information mapping exercise was planned for one of a series of meetings of a DES action learning set, convened to consider in-depth issues relating to culture information and cross-cutting issues. The primary aim was to arrive at a reasonable agreement between the corporate information team and specific services about whose responsibility it was to collect and collate the information required to develop a robust DES.

#### **Process and approach**

The group addressed the following questions:

- How would you describe the quality and quantity of data that is available to services (planners, service delivery, performance management)?

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<sup>16</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) ‘Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector’, [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

- What sort of requests for information (raw or processed) do you receive, and from whom?
- What are the primary sources of information (eg census, local, how much of it is based on views of local people)?
- What sort of data from services would assist the development of a central resource or evidence base?

The group then went on to consider the levels of awareness about and commitment to equality issues, based on the answers to the questions above.

## **Outcomes and learning**

The principal outcomes of this exercise were the clarification of the quality and quantity of information available to support the development of the DES, and gap analysis of what will be required to make an assessment of progress. There was agreement that a central information resource should be established that all services could access, which would hold essential information about disabled people in the local area.

## **Accessible formats directory**

### **Context and objectives**

Staff in a large county council in England believed that there was a requirement to produce every official council document in every possible format and felt overwhelmed by this. As a result, the availability of alternative formats for disabled people with different requirements was very patchy.

### **Process and approach**

To overcome these problems, the corporate equalities team set up a small working group (involving, for example, individuals from the council's education services communication unit) to create a directory of accessible formats. This group gathered information about different publication formats, and took advice from various disability groups to gauge the importance and appropriateness of different formats for use in different situations. Once this

information had been compiled, the directory was launched at a management conference, and made available on the internet. Since this launch, council staff have received regular and frequent messages to remind them of its existence and how best to make use of it.

## **Outcomes and learning**

Although keeping this directory up to date is a challenge, the exercise has proved successful in getting staff in the council to consider alternative formats at the planning stage of a publication or initiative, and to target their use of alternative formats more effectively. This approach has reduced the pressure on staff by helping them to see that the emphasis should be on ‘making publications and resources available to all who need them in their preferred format’, rather than producing ‘every document in every conceivable format’.

Whilst the DRC sees the benefit of having documents available in a range of formats in advance of people requesting these, this particular project clearly shows how resources can be targeted to the maximum effect.

## **Accessible information for disabled people**

### **Context and objectives**

A research project into the views of disabled people living in a mostly rural county, conducted on behalf of the local council, identified that local government and health organisations published a number of guides relating to their services. This plethora of information was often confusing for disabled people and hindered them from accessing the right services at the right time. This led to a project to make access to information easier for disabled people.

### **Process and approach**

The research highlighted the need to ensure that information is made available to all council customers. There was already a local multi-agency project underway looking at making information accessible and the council intends to use this mechanism to make information available to disabled people.

The presentation of information is also being addressed by several other means. A training session was held internally with the web design team on accessible web design. This was well received and with the help of the visual impairment rehabilitation officer it was agreed to set up a local user group to monitor the council's web site. A training session was again held with the graphic design team. It was agreed from this session that a range of publications would be looked at regularly by the local access group to ensure that information is accessible to all.

## **Outcomes and learning**

One particularly interesting finding of the research was that many of the services that disabled people felt were not available actually were. This was exemplified by the fact that one of the issues raised by disabled people was a lack of hoists in swimming pools. In fact there were hoists available at all of the local pools, but people had not been made aware of this fact.

A 'world café' ([see the involvement section](#)) is planned to spend time exploring with the stakeholder groups what might work best for this community.

## **Gathering information as part of an overall strategic process**

### **Context and objectives**

A large urban borough had, in the past, undertaken some consultation with known individuals and disability equality groups. However, it had never been frequent or strategic in nature. As a consequence, the authority knew very little about the trends in numbers or perceptions of its disabled staff and residents. The statutory duty, along with accompanying legislation, acted as a catalyst for the council to reorganise priorities and to recognise the importance of fostering a beneficial relationship with disabled individuals and organisations.

## **Process and approach**

The council's Disability Equality Manager consulted all active and retired disabled staff to gain their feedback on the main issues they encountered not only as staff but also as residents. The willingness of the respondents to participate in the agenda in the long term was also gauged. After analysing the results, the manager undertook structured one-to-one interviews with a sample of respondents and some members of a local disability network. This provided an opportunity to gain qualitative information which could be utilised alongside the quantitative information which the authority already had. It also supplemented the work the authority was doing on involving disabled people and helped to assess the priorities for the Action Plan.

The meeting also served as an opportunity for the manager to brief key officers on the duty and other guidelines emanating from the DRC. The ensuing debate allowed for a high level of awareness and consensus to be achieved amongst attendees.

In turn, feedback was given to the disabled staff who had indicated an interest to be consulted over the outcome of the meeting. In particular, they were advised of those factors that the council could not implement. Such direct discourse allowed expectations to be managed quite well and gave extra credibility to the process. Those present endorsed the Action Plan and an accompanying list of priorities for the scheme to focus on was highlighted.

## **Outcomes and learning**

The internal Action Plan was fully conceived and endorsed by those that it affected the most, that is, disabled residents and staff. Achieving progress in this case was largely due to the council not attempting to do everything at once and without proper information. Instead, by establishing new channels of communication, the council has been able to engage disabled staff in a positive, honest and interactive manner. Such a blueprint is now being followed for consultation with residents: the main groups being the local disability network and an older people's network.

### **3a. Mainstreaming and sustainability – internal**

It is important to ensure that the Disability Equality Scheme demonstrates commitment at the very highest level of authority and the DRC strongly recommends that the introduction should have the endorsement of and be signed by the chief executive or their equivalent. Another factor that may be helpful in ensuring the implementation of the DES is having a senior officer take responsibility for the implementation of the duty and the scheme. Having someone with disability expertise to advise and co-ordinate would also be beneficial. The following examples show how different authorities have mainstreamed their DES and ensured its sustainability, based on the real-life experiences of the councils we worked with during this project.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Using an action learning set**

##### **Context and objectives**

A corporate equalities lead at a large, mostly rural, county with a patchy record of successful, sustained implementation of the equalities agenda felt that it was suffering from general resistance amongst managers to acknowledge the value of disability equality initiatives.

Similarly, the lead member had concerns about how they could ‘sell’ initiatives to his (mostly cynical) peers and articulate the business case for disability equality, over and above a genuine commitment to the agenda. Previous equality initiatives (eg race equality) had probably contributed to this cynicism.

##### **Process and approach**

About 15 representatives from across council services (including corporate functions and partner agencies, such as health), as well as disabled people from the community, elected members (toward the later stages) and corporate equalities leads were invited to join an action learning set. A learning set is a group that meets regularly in

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<sup>17</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) ‘Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector’, [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

order to explore solutions to problems and decide on necessary actions.

The primary objective of the set was to work through the practical implications of developing a DES for the council, using the previous experience of both staff who have been involved in other equalities initiatives and those with a keen interest in these areas. The learning set has met four times (facilitated initially by an external consultant) and options for the group to continue as a self-managing set are currently being considered.

## **Outcomes and learning**

The action learning set approach allowed participants to:

- interpret findings from any local research (eg mystery shopping)
- share experiences of conducting equalities impact assessments and the wider organisational culture (including those for other equalities areas)
- share good practice and discuss what assessments reveal about services, and the way that impact assessments can be made more integral to service planning, delivery and performance management
- test the rationale and business case for a DES for different parts of the service
- identify cross-cutting and corporate challenges and barriers to the successful implementation of a management and service culture which incorporates disability issues into planning and service delivery (in this way anticipating the challenges to mainstreaming)
- conduct action planning and synthesis of messages for the Corporate Equalities Board, including the identification of performance measures which relate to the duties and requirements of the DES and those that could be used to assess achievement of intended outcomes.

The benefits for the participants included developing skills as equalities champions and as people who have generic audit and

inspection skills which can be deployed for other purposes (eg in support of Comprehensive Performance Assessment in England, Wales Programme for Improvement, and performance indicators in Scotland).

## **Difficulties in achieving buy-in at senior levels**

### **Context and objectives**

Buy-in at a senior level is crucial for effective implementation of the duty and an authority's DES, both internally and externally. A medium sized urban council has been struggling to obtain top-level commitment in its effort to ensure the DES is high profile across the council. Despite impressive progress in drafting the scheme, and enthusiasm from some members, overall commitment to disability equality is perceived as low. Resistance is thought to stem from the perception of the DES as 'just another scheme' in an environment where pressure on local authorities to produce multiple schemes and plans is already so great.

### **Process and approach**

The approach to internal mainstreaming has been driven from an educationalist viewpoint that increasing understanding of the importance of issues leads to enhanced involvement and uptake. Equality champions have also been asked to disseminate information to their individual equality members, and existing structures such as the corporate equalities group have been exploited to reach a maximum number of people. 'Gentle coaxing' has been adopted in place of the 'big stick approach' for particular individual senior managers, and constant referral to the disability equality information on the council intranet has been maintained. Gentle 'peer pressure' has also been beneficial through the introduction of an element of competition for senior managers to inform their directorate about promoting the importance and uptake of the DES.

### **Outcomes and learning**

Despite a remaining lack of commitment from certain senior figures within the council, constant persistence has resulted in a rise in levels of commitment to the scheme. Disability equality training is also well attended and the importance of the issues is beginning to be

conveyed. High-profile engagement by the scrutiny panel has also led to a raised profile across all levels of the council.

To overcome the problem of continuing lack of substantive buy-in from certain senior figures, this council might want to think about using action learning sets as an approach to the issue.

## **Making assessment meaningful**

### **Context and objectives**

One of the challenges faced by a smaller local authority was, in the words of the equalities officer, ‘how to encourage staff to get as excited about disability equality issues as you are’. One of the solutions to meeting this challenge was found in the council’s approach to equalities impact assessments – it found that the easier the template was to follow, the more likely staff were to be interested.

### **Process and approach**

The assessment framework was piloted in the area of pre-application planning advice, and looked at whether there were people in the community who found it hard to access. The council learned from this pilot exercise that it was important to clarify the purpose of the assessment exercise at the beginning. Throughout the course of implementing the framework other methods were found which made the process more painless, such as piggy-backing on to existing monitoring schemes. For example, the planning team holds a data base of customers served during the current year, and given that service quality monitoring forms were sent out to these individuals anyway, it was decided to add in some questions relating to equality and diversity.

### **Outcomes and learning**

One of the key ingredients of the successful completion of this pilot was the inclusion of staff in the process of designing the equalities impact assessment exercise, in order to find out (but also to challenge) what they felt to be relevant. Being included in the scoping and decision-making process was beneficial in terms of securing higher levels of buy-in and ownership of the process in the long run.

## **An organic approach**

### **Context and objectives**

An urban council in the North West of England invited disabled residents on the International Day for Disabled People in December 2005 not only to celebrate the occasion but also to launch a Disability Partnership Board. Moreover, other disabled residents from existing forums were asked to comment on the nature and scope of a board. They were also asked to disclose whether they wanted to be involved in the process. Initially, eight residents indicated their interest but the final number was reduced to six.

### **Process and approach**

From December 2005 to early May 2006, the six board members were allowed time to discuss issues such as: what they wanted the board to do and who they wanted to involve from the council. The individuals decided that they wanted to involve senior officers from the local authority, and from the employment, transport, housing and health sectors. The Officer for Disability Equality used her contacts to get the relevant representatives on board from the identified list. By February 2006, a chair had been found and elected, and it was subsequently decided that the chair would always be a disabled person. It was also decided that the chair should have a seat on the local strategic partnership board.

### **Outcomes and learning**

The first board meeting occurred in May 2006, by which time the disabled residents were clear and confident about the direction they wanted to take. The benefits of this gradual approach have been the higher involvement, commitment and understanding generated by board members. The disabled residents on the board have also reached agreement on six priorities they want the council to tackle. They chose clear priorities as they realised they could not do everything at once. The chair, with other residents, has also put together an Action Plan for the year, which is being circulated to service departments for comment and approval.

Whilst the DRC would recommend a range of measures for involving disabled people this is a clear example of targeted involvement which

is both ongoing and effective and would ideally run alongside other involvement measures.

## **Training partners**

### **Context and objectives**

The Adult Services Division of a large urban authority has, in partnership with a local community college, been running a project to raise disability access standards in adult and community learning and further education. The specific objective of this project is to benefit learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on work related training courses at the college by creating direct links to a structured work placement programme in the council.

### **Process and approach**

The council and college established a joint team, which has provided two training workshops for managers, and identified mentors on raising disability awareness in the workplace, with practical examples of job descriptions. The council is also piloting a review of recruitment and selection processes.

There have been particular challenges for this scheme around engaging with departmental managers, even though the director of the division in question had said that this was a priority. Because of external (Learning and Skills Council) constraints, there was also a limited amount of time for managers to sign up for the training session.

### **Outcomes and learning**

The outcomes of this ongoing project are that over 30 hours of extra work placement opportunities have been developed. As an added bonus, other divisions within the council have expressed interest in participating in the training programme. The fact that the training session was designed and led by a manager with an excellent reputation and status locally has also bolstered the credibility of the scheme.

## **Starting from a low base**

### **Context and objectives**

A local authority in a very diverse urban area has been implementing a training programme called 'Serving Disabled Customers' for a number of years. This was a distance learning programme, and was the only substantive disability equality training attempted. As a result of the DDA, the council has now started reviewing its approach by involving disabled people. It has also recently appointed a 'disability champion' who is the deputy director.

### **Process and approach**

The review has led to the creation of a Disability Project Board, made up of two-thirds of disabled people and the rest senior council managers from education, children, housing and other front-line service areas.

There was also a launch event called 'In on the Act', which emphasised how improvements under the new DDA can only be achieved by engaging positively with disabled people. It was held in May 2006, and the purpose was to show disability in a positive way and demonstrate how disabled people can live an active life. The day included workshops focusing on key areas and, as was expected, these became reference groups which are currently developing action plans for the council's DES.

A professional video was made which was used in the internal management forum and has been shown to staff and at the event. It was aimed at raising awareness of a positive image of disability and the issues that disabled people face locally.

### **Outcomes and learning**

This project is still in its initial stages, and while there is the potential for success, real outcomes for disabled people have yet to be achieved. Theoretically heads of service now have reference groups to draw upon and have the task of developing a disability Action Plan for their service area. The challenge now will be how they engage with their users and ensure that disabled people feel it is a worthwhile use of their time and that they are being listened to.

## **A new model of disability training**

### **Context and objectives**

This authority had in the past offered disability equality training, but it had never been compulsory for staff. Additional problems were caused by the fact that for every staff member attending the training there would be a transfer of resources between departments to cover the cost. The result was that take-up of the training was historically low.

### **Process and approach**

To remedy this, the council's access officer has been piloting a new training model in her directorate. Under this model, a 45-minute slot in team meetings is requested, where the access officer gives basic disability equality training (focusing, for example, on challenging stereotypical thinking about disability, and the social model). A prerequisite for the success of the new model was the securing of directorate management team buy-in. In addition the officer gave a more lengthy, two-hour training session for the customer care section in the directorate, given the impact that individuals have in this team over customer service standards.

### **Outcomes**

Achieving progress in this case was partly a result of making the case that, as a fifth of the council's residents meets the DDA criteria for being a disabled person, improving service for disabled people would make a big difference to overall satisfaction with council services – at no additional cost. The access officer's position was also strengthened by the fact that the council is currently undergoing a Customer First review. The pilot of the new training model has proved successful and will be expanded to other departments.

## **Increasing confidence around disability equality**

### **Context and objectives**

A large council covering both rural and urban areas has faced high levels of resistance during the internal mainstreaming of issues relating to the development of its DES. A dramatic change in mindset

and culture is thought to be needed within the council to engage staff in its development. Many currently view equality and diversity matters as being on the periphery of their core job descriptions, creating a widespread reluctance to engage in time-consuming discussions and activities related to disability equality issues. A lack of resources within the council has led the disability equality lead to feel isolated and unsupported by colleagues while trying to push the agenda forward virtually single-handedly.

### **Process and approach**

This lack of engagement has been highlighted through efforts to motivate members of staff to become involved in the design and delivery of impact assessments. The assessment process is an ongoing one, during which identified gaps must be successfully addressed in line with demanding time constraints. Motivating staff to carry out this work on top of everyday pressures of work can prove highly challenging.

### **Outcomes and learning**

One initiative for boosting enthusiasm has involved a concerted effort to raise morale by providing constructive feedback and praise for those who have become involved. The aim is that a positive experience of the assessment process will be disseminated to colleagues throughout the council, increasing enthusiasm and engagement in future assessment processes. The benefits of this feedback process are also thought to have raised the profile of disability and equality issues more generally across the council.

### **Working with a disability consultant to improve training**

#### **Context and objectives**

A small rural council had been offering race and gender equality training as part of its equal opportunities strategy. Disability equality issues were covered partially in the training, but did not feature highly. In addition, training was being hampered because of a resource shortage; not only financial but also in terms of manpower to cover attendees. The result was that disability equality training was limited in scope and impact.

## **Process and approach**

Since the amendments to the Act introducing the duty for local authorities, the council has given the area due attention by increasing the resource commitment. This growing focus is signified by the recent development of a separate module on disability equality training within the wider training programme for front-line staff. A local disability-focused consultancy was commissioned to train the internal trainers along with making wider recommendations on other pertinent issues such as buildings and access.

Attendance at the training is going to become mandatory for all staff in the near future as the council is following an ambitious plan to train all staff within two years. Securing the support of the directorate management team has been crucial in making disability training a priority. Indeed, several chief officers were among the first cohort of staff to receive training. It is hoped that their productive participation and resulting experience will increase the interest of their staff in taking part.

Internally, the initiative is perceived as a growing priority because its potential benefits have been linked with the wider Customer First (satisfaction standards) drive.

## **Outcomes and learning**

Initially, the DDA criteria helped the policy manager to make the case that it was in the best interest of the council to act as it was aiming to increase the satisfaction of 'hard-to-reach' residents. Certainly, by linking staff training and awareness with customer satisfaction standards, the resource commitment from senior officers has been more forthcoming.

Finally, by employing disability specialists to develop the training programme within a wider consultancy remit has helped the council to progress along the agenda smoothly – both in terms of time taken and impact.

## **Making use of a ‘critical friend’**

### **Context and objectives**

A ‘critical friend’ can be invaluable in providing constructive challenge and support throughout the development of a Disability Equality Scheme. A predominantly rural local authority had formed a core working group and generated initial interest from service users, staff and local advocacy organisations. However, differing opinions, expectations and levels of commitment from these groups were adversely affecting progress on reaching consensus and adopting a Scheme or Action Plan. Additionally, council staff needed expert support to embed processes and mechanisms to facilitate effective mainstreaming and assessment.

### **Process and approach**

The assistant policy officer raised the concerns with the chief executive’s team and a decision to recruit a disability consultant/project manager was taken. The consultant was to act in the capacity of a ‘critical friend’. It was anticipated that the addition of an external specialist would bring useful experience and a fresh perspective to the disability equality agenda.

The position was advertised in the local media and through local disability-focused organisations. An individual with a project management background was recruited on a temporary contract. He was a disabled person, which helped other council staff to recognise the value of his opinions and input.

A prerequisite for the success of the appointment was securing directorate management team support at the chief executive level.

### **Outcomes and learning**

Initially, the project manager mapped existing and potential internal and external links between different departments and key officers. Since then, a wider variety of professionals has been involved in the working group, making it more strategic. For instance, the community cohesion officer, strategic planning officer from Adult Social Care and the equalities officer are now regular attendees. The project manager also designed and analysed a benchmarking survey

**of all disabled staff. This has enabled the council to gather views of staff and has opened up new opportunities/linkages for all stakeholders.**

**Although the cost of employing a designated project manager was quite high in the short term, the council believes that the progress achieved in the longer term will justify the investment.**

## **3b. Mainstreaming and sustainability – external and partnerships**

In addition to ensuring the duty and therefore the development of the DES is mainstreamed and sustainable within each local authority it is also necessary to work closely with external partners and stakeholders. No organisation operates in a vacuum and the success of the duty and a DES will be dependent to some extent on partner organisations. Other advantages of working with partner organisations include cost savings, and avoiding duplication of effort (as well as ‘consultation fatigue’). The following are specific examples of how local authorities have tackled external mainstreaming and sustainability, and working in partnership, based on the real-life experiences of the councils we worked with during this project.

### **Working with a fragmented voluntary sector**

#### **Context and objectives**

A mainly rural local authority has a staff disability forum internally and as a result of the implementation of legislation in 2004 set up a DDA task group. This external group is not working as well as it could and has become plagued by internal disputes and negativity. While both groups have disabled people with diverse impairments represented, the emphasis does tend to be on physical impairments and barriers.

#### **Process and approach**

The internal group is starting to develop a work plan for the council, which is about making things right for disabled people in the environment in which they work. Externally the group had a DDA conference in October 2004 and it has been involved in developing the Equalities Impact Assessment framework across the six areas as well as geographical assessments unique to the locality.

#### **Outcomes and learning**

Owing to the location of the authority it should in theory be straightforward to develop a single process for involvement which all services can use, as well as for the production of a DES , but

problems are caused by the number of disability organisations (over 80), including small charities, representing a population of only 136,000 people. Raising awareness about the DES is a challenge and it can be hard to get the 80 groups to focus on how to make an improvement for all rather than individual issues. One of the solutions is to hold an involvement day where the council can promote the value of speaking with one voice in order for that to be better heard.

## **Building on pockets of good practice**

### **Context and objectives**

A small district council in England in a previously heavily industrial area of the country was aware of many pockets of good practice around disability equality, but was also concerned that this had not always been sustained or linked into broader council strategy. As a result, a disability forum was established with the express purpose of working in partnership with key external organisations (the council already had particularly good links with the local PCT, for example) to take a more mainstreamed approach to the issues facing disabled people.

### **Process and approach**

The forum started off on a reasonably small scale, but is looking to increase the number of people involved by tapping into residents' forums already established in the area, and 'snowballing' membership using current staff members. The forum is, however, already making progress despite its limited resources, thanks to a variety of partnership work. For example, the forum is leading on delivering a county-wide event in partnership with the other local authorities in the area, along with health trusts, fire and police authorities, and the local university.

The forum has also led on the corporate branding of disability equality, in order to raise awareness of the issue, and has worked with elected members.

## **Outcomes and learning**

Partnership working has been a challenge in this example, either because not all the organisations involved currently have equalities officers, or because disability equality is not always prioritised to the same extent in different places. There were also specific difficulties caused by major organisational restructuring in the local primary care trusts. Finally, the council's equalities lead is aware that there is always a tendency to work hardest with organisations with existing strong links with the council – for example a local arms-length housing provider. Upon reflection, it would seem appropriate to use existing strong links as a base from which to build wider partnership working.

## **Practical steps to overcome challenges around training**

### **Context and objectives**

A small rural borough council in England has developed a joint assessment training programme with neighbouring county and district councils as part of a combined endeavour towards the early achievement of Level 2 of the Equalities Standard for Local Government (this is the equivalent to Scotland's Best Value Equalities Principle). A consulting firm was commissioned to inform the design and development of a pilot scheme aimed at encouraging county and district councils to share knowledge and skills targeted towards joint assessment training. It was hoped that the pooling of a broad range of experience would contribute to a unique and beneficial training programme to improve assessment across the area.

### **Process and approach**

One of the main challenges was overcoming capacity issues to ensure maximum uptake on the course. The development of a geographically flexible training scheme was implemented in response so that people unable to attend training in their specific area could attend courses at other councils. Advance warning of training sessions was also provided, and the timescale of courses was extended from February to July to maximise opportunity for uptake across the sessions.

## **Outcomes and learning**

One of the positive outcomes to emerge from the joint training sessions has been the sustainability of the contact with other authorities, and improved relationships and partnership working over the development of the DES. Informal channels of communication between councils have been noticeably expanded, which has greatly facilitated information sharing. More structured networks of accountability have also formed through the organisation of joint events to promote effective information dissemination about the development of their DES.

## **User-led partnerships**

### **Context and objectives**

A large predominantly rural county council is in the process of adopting a DES and accompanying set of Action Plans; it is in the early stages of linking in the relevant information with the main providers of key services. The strategy behind the development of the DES and Action Plans was entirely undertaken by the Physical and Sensory Impairment Board (PSIB) – a partnership group comprising representatives from national, regional and local disability user and advocacy groups.

### **Process and approach**

The senior commissioning manager in social care is currently supporting the board. This individual provides input and links in the Action Plans to the rest of the local authority. Several representatives from a range of social services teams also frequently provide assistance. The partnership also has several area subgroups to cover all the main disability equality areas. Nevertheless, the council is keen to ensure that information and progress cascades across its structure in an effective manner and has recognised the need to build more formal and informal links and partnerships across its departments.

## **Outcomes and learning**

The board is leading the work strategically and is using local authority personnel and resources to disseminate its work to local district councils, PCTs, the police service and the local university. As a result, progress is being achieved quite quickly. However, one of the key challenges facing the council is to fulfil the vision of the board by meeting its ‘challenging’ expectations.

## **A partnership approach to strategy building**

### **Context and objectives**

A large urban local authority in Scotland had concerns that partner organisations in the community and individuals would suffer from ‘consultation fatigue’ as a result of various services or directorates consulting on a variety of issues (eg race, gender, disability) with the same people and groups. There was also apprehension that strategic thinking was being impeded by carrying out service specific or random engagement.

### **Process and approach**

As a result, the council decided to adopt a multi-equalities scheme encompassing six strands of equality – race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, faith/belief and AIDS. The DRC urges caution with an overarching equality scheme, and suggests that if this approach is taken, separate and distinct arrangements for gathering evidence around disability equality and involving disabled people are included, along with separate action plans for all strands.<sup>18</sup> If taking a unified approach it will be helpful to ‘level up’ across all equalities areas. The DRC recommends that in order to ensure an effective and coordinated approach across the duties you utilise the highest standard from each duty (for example taking the precedent from the DED in relation to involvement and applying this to both race and gender) across all equality areas you are covering in your scheme.

The local authority in question has been able to keep a sufficient

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<sup>18</sup> See the DRC’s position on single equality schemes at [www.drc.org.uk/employers\\_and\\_service\\_provider/disability\\_equality\\_duty/getting\\_started/doing\\_the\\_duty.aspx](http://www.drc.org.uk/employers_and_service_provider/disability_equality_duty/getting_started/doing_the_duty.aspx)

focus on the individual strands by maximising the involvement of disabled people, and clearly outlining the roles and responsibilities of relevant user and voluntary groups. Indeed, it has demonstrated its ability to progress on the disability agenda by stringently following the DRC code of practice and relevant guidance.

There are six executive-level forums that feed into the work of the six strands. The Disability Forum, which is comprised of local disabled residents and advocacy organisations, is the main medium of consultation. The forum is administered and chaired by representatives from a local disability organisation, which also arranges agendas, venues and other details of meetings. In fact, this role was tendered and several organisations indicated an interest in carrying out the business administration.

An equalities review of all strategies, plans, mechanisms and processes is going to be undertaken annually.

## **Outcomes and learning**

Public authorities from the health, transport, police and the university use the forum's membership and links to involve disabled people on key policy areas. This method has coordinated and rationalised the number of consultations in the local area. Limited administrative input has also created capacity (in terms of time and finance) for the equalities team to pursue more strategic objectives.

Initially, the DDA criteria enabled the policy manager to make the case that it was in the best interest of the council to act. In addition, by linking staff training and awareness with customer satisfaction standards, the resources and commitment from senior officers has been more forthcoming.

Finally, by employing disability specialists to develop the training programme within a wider consultancy remit, the council has moved along the agenda smoothly both in terms of time taken and implementation.

## **4. Assessment, monitoring and evaluation**

Local authorities need to set out how they will undertake disability equality impact assessments. The objective of these assessments will be to ensure that a council's activities do not disadvantage disabled people (whether this is intentional or not). Additionally, impact assessments will identify where councils can promote equality of opportunity. Any gaps in policies or adverse effects should be addressed by the council.<sup>19</sup> The following are specific examples of how local authorities have tackled assessment, monitoring and evaluation, based on the real-life experiences of the councils we worked with during this project.

### **Taking the fear out of impact assessments**

#### **Context and objectives**

A large city council had become aware that a negative perception of the impact assessment process was detracting from the effective assessment of services in relation to disability equality. The design and delivery of these assessments was believed to 'frighten the life out of people' within the council, largely due to a fear of 'getting it wrong'. It was also apparent that many people held unrealistic perceptions as to how time-consuming and ambitious the process was likely to be. This was creating a culture of resentment which meant little commitment existed to make the process work. It was felt that the practicalities and feasibility of the assessment process had not been well communicated previously, and that a change in the language surrounding the process may help to restore both the image of impact assessments internally, and the importance of the disability equality agenda more widely.

#### **Process and approach**

A new training programme was developed in response to this with a specific focus on 're-branding' disability equality impact assessments in the hope of presenting the process in a more positive and realistic light.

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<sup>19</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) 'Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector', [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

The first method employed was to highlight the very real overlap between the impact assessment process and the everyday work carried out by staff within the council. Efforts were made to present the assessments as a method of ‘recording practices already in existence’, rather than as an unrelated procedure to be started from scratch. A decision was also made to change the language, which contained a novel reference to the process as ‘discrimination risk assessment’ ‘It was thought that this would help minimise apprehension resulting from previous association with more rigid and formal processes. Whilst the DRC would not recommend solely focusing on risk assessments, because this can make the process negative and does not reflect the need to identify opportunities to promote disability equality, in this particular situation the authority believed this would be the most effective approach.

Another action to improve attitudes towards assessment was to highlight the positive visible outcomes arising from previously completed assessments. A particular example highlighted was a prestigious award won by the gallery service for café accessibility, which was presented as a result of simple alterations made following an impact assessment. Good practice examples of ‘minor changes’ made through assessments also demonstrated the potential simplicity of outcomes. An example of such a change was the provision of straws and other appropriate elements such as mugs with handles to customers in the gallery café, which was a simple measure leading to noticeable differences for a number of disabled customers.

## **Outcomes and learning**

Following these efforts to remove the anxiety and apprehension surrounding impact assessments, there has been a noticeable increase in enthusiasm and commitment towards making the process work. Staff have reported feeling more confident about carrying out assessments, and more aware of the potential benefits and outcomes for services. There have also been stronger partnerships formed between certain departments following training: they have been encouraged to work together on assessing overlapping areas to alleviate work load. The social services and housing departments have been working particularly closely on areas which straddle both departments, such as the assessment of equipment and adaptations. An increased focus on forward planning of impact assessment processes has helped to minimise the previous resentment arising

from unforeseen constraints on time and resources.

## **Achieving concrete change as a result of equality impact assessments**

### **Context and objectives**

In the past, a large inner-city council had been criticised for the lack of concrete action for disabled service users, staff and residents arising from its equality impact assessment process. In order to address this, the equalities team began a process of linking equality impact assessment to ongoing monitoring in a far more rigorous and systematic fashion. Where necessary, specific initiatives such as staff training in particular areas have also been implemented to ensure that the assessment process leads to real action.

### **Process and approach**

In one case, the council found evidence that its local street markets did not provide appropriate access for disabled people, including access to toilet facilities. A public consultation exercise was included as part of the equality impact assessment, and showed that a large proportion of shop owners felt that more should be done for disabled people, including improvements to pavements and public thoroughfares. Access to the market was particularly difficult when market traders operated outside of their designated pitch markings (which caused problems both for disabled and non-disabled people). In another field, an equality impact assessment highlighted problems for disabled people in helping the building as a whole to comply with fire drill evacuation targets.

### **Outcomes and learning**

In both cases, concrete improvements were made to bring about equality for disabled people. In the case of the street markets, the impact assessment was combined with disability monitoring of market traders to ensure that those disabled people who need close or very regular toilet access were provided with pitches closer to these facilities. Continual monitoring has also allowed the council to ‘clamp down’ on traders who stray outside of their designated pitch sites.

With regard to fire drills in the building mentioned above, a number of actions were taken, including:

- the installation of evacuation chairs, and training of up to four people on each floor in their use
- staff who have been trained were made aware of the people they would be expected to help during a drill, and materials indicating who had been trained were displayed on each floor
- a ‘pilot evacuation’ of one particular drill, using the new chairs, to establish the time needed overall.

## **Fostering better communication between departments**

### **Context and objectives**

A large urban council has a strong history of successfully implementing policies and developing innovative approaches to problem solving in the field of disability equality. However, as a direct consequence of this focus upon generating ideas, there has been a lack of emphasis placed on measuring outcomes. The forthcoming Disability Equality Duty has placed pressure on the council to develop robust impact assessment processes in terms of disability equality. Not only will the council need to ensure that outcomes are assessed when new policies and activities are developed, but authorities will also need to assess the back catalogue of existing policies and activities already in place. A further challenge for this authority in developing its assessment process was the level of disengagement between the Human Resources (HR) department, who are in charge of the assessment practice and processes, and the Disability Equality Unit.

### **Process and approach**

In order to unite the experience and knowledge within both departments, it was crucial to develop strategies that would help both teams to work better together during the development of impact assessment processes. An initial knowledge-sharing workshop was set up with attendees from the HR department, the Disability Equality Unit and the local disability forum. The first stage of the workshop enabled HR representatives to brief the Disability Equality Unit on

current practices and thinking behind current assessment processes, while the second stage consisted of a presentation given by the Disability Equality lead. This provided a policy briefing based upon the current developments of the DES, and the forthcoming requirements of the DED.

## **Outcomes and learning**

Following a briefing from the HR department and input from the disability representatives, the disability equality unit felt equipped with the knowledge required to design a robust assessment process. The aim is now to ensure that all policies and activities are measured with a much sharper focus on outcomes. A structured feedback system has been put in place to enable the HR department to steer the process of impact assessment through fortnightly meetings. This has led to the creation and maintenance of more effective channels of communication between the two departments, enabling more integrated methods of working.

## **‘Mystery shopping’ – an innovative assessment process**

### **Context and objectives**

Following the successful completion of structured and formal disability equality impact assessments, a urban council was keen to embark upon a more ‘hands-on’ user-focused approach to assessment. The aim was to tap into the real-life experiences of disabled people with a particular focus upon learning more about their experiences of the ‘softer’ elements of disability equality, such as staff awareness and attitudes to disability. The council thought it was important to develop an innovative approach to identifying gaps, adverse impacts and missed opportunities in relation to disability equality. In partnership with the local disability forum, the council started to brainstorm around innovative methods of actively involving disabled people in the assessment process.

### **Process and approach**

Volunteers (who were suitably recompensed for their time) from the local disability forum were asked to take part in a ‘mystery shopping’ exercise, where they could assess directly different aspects of service provision, in terms of their own experiences of using the

services. The volunteers accessed a range of the authority's activities randomly, including using the website to gather information, and communicating with council staff over the telephone and face to face. Volunteers were provided with a structured framework against which to measure a range of different, largely 'soft' indicators, such as staff consideration for disability and clarity of telephone communication. A focus was placed on gaining richer and more qualitative feedback, in contrast to the hard quantitative data obtained during the more structured assessment processes previously undertaken.

## **Outcomes and learning**

Feedback was collated from 20 mystery shopping examinations spanning a range of different service-user experiences over a two-month period. A summary report of findings was subsequently produced and widely circulated, informing recommendations for further training and enabling the provision of more focused feedback to specific departments. The scheduling of regular mystery shopping exercises in the future aims to highlight any improvements in the experience of disabled people, and maintain strong links with partnership organisations to help with future engagement in assessment processes.

## **Kitemarking services**

### **Context and objectives**

A large urban authority covering an extremely diverse population wanted to foster a culture of inclusion in schools, and therefore set about developing an 'inclusion kitemark'. A working group of head teachers, council officers and parent representatives undertook this project, but the views of disabled children themselves were not directly taken into account during the development phase. This lack of involvement at the outset was felt to hamper progress significantly.

### **Process and approach**

Eleven schools were chosen to pilot the kitemark scheme, and these schools were visited to assess the extent to which they practised inclusiveness, and awarded a bronze, silver or gold award depending on their success. It was expected that schools would have an

accessibility plan for disabled children as part of the kitemark standard. Schools were also required to make reasonable adjustments on a regular basis and ensure that this was fully incorporated into day-to-day practice. Information was gathered on a self-assessment basis, with questionnaires, documentation and observations all being sources of evidence.

### **Outcomes and learning**

One of the major (if unexpected) benefits of the kitemark visits was that they acted as evidence-gathering exercises, with visits flagging up accessibility issues and leading to action plans to address these. The full roll-out of the scheme is planned for September 2006, and the authority intends to involve parents and disabled children to a much greater extent in this. This will be particularly important to prevent the specific needs of disabled children being lost in this council's generic approach to inclusion – whereby disability is only one of some 20 factors taken into account.

## **5. Action planning**

An essential part of any DES is the process of action planning. The plan should incorporate a number of elements including the priorities of disabled people (shaped by the involvement of disabled people), the priorities of the council and specific outcomes which the authority wishes to achieve, set against a realistic timetable.<sup>20</sup>

It is essential that senior managers are closely involved in setting priorities for action and take responsibility for developing and taking these forward within their own departments. The following are specific examples of how local authorities have tackled action planning, based on the real-life experiences of the councils we worked with during this project.

### **The ‘multi-method’ approach to action planning**

#### **Context and objectives**

A local authority in a relatively deprived urban area had previously experienced difficulties in involving certain groups of disabled people during the early stages of their DES. They were therefore keen to employ a more robust approach to gaining information on the future priorities of disabled people to inform the writing of their DES action plan. In particular, they wanted to ensure good representation from individuals with sensory and visual impairments, as they had experienced difficulties engaging with these people in the past. The local authority therefore had to think creatively about involving these disabled groups in the action planning process.

#### **Process and approach**

It was decided that the best approach for maximising levels of engagement with the widest range of disabled people would be through a web-based survey, which asked people to provide their ‘top 10 priority areas’ for the next five years. Information on the overarching aims of the Action Plan was provided, along with examples of measures that could be taken to work towards them.

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<sup>20</sup> Disability Rights Commission (2005) ‘Doing the Duty, an overview of the Disability Equality Duty for the public sector’, [www.dotheduty.org](http://www.dotheduty.org)

After consulting with representatives from local sensory and visual impairment organisations, it became clear that the dominance of web-based consultation tools was preventing the active involvement of these groups. This was because visually impaired people in the area did not have access to the necessary computer facilities. As a result, a variety of approaches for engaging with individuals with sensory and visual impairments was carried out. These included personal visits made by staff to visual and sensory impairment forums, individuals' homes and the production of large print hard copies of the web-based surveys.

### **Outcomes and learning**

As a result of involving visual and sensory impairment groups in the development of the action plan, a new focus on the priority areas of these groups was incorporated within the DES action plan. Examples of priority areas which were included as a result of this consultation process included:

- the use of video phone technology for some council services
- a focus on specifically improving access for deaf people to local services and information
- the improvement of interpretation and human aids to communication within the council.

### **Race equality schemes: difficulties associated with taking a similar approach**

#### **Context and objectives**

A council in a largely rural region of Great Britain has a greatly advanced Race Equality Scheme, developed to respond better to the needs of large black and minority ethnic communities in the local population. Sophisticated action plans with a specific focus on race equality issues were therefore in existence when initial meetings about the DES Action Plan began. Given the time constraints imposed by the forthcoming DED deadline, the temptation to build the DES Action Plan around the template offered by existing RES action plans was noticeably present within the council. However, during initial Action Plan meetings, staff in the equalities team raised

concerns about whether this approach would meet DED standards.

## **Process and approach**

In the early stages of the disability equality action plan, the council made sure that careful consideration was given to the differences between race and disability. It soon became clear that for this local authority a disability equality Action Plan based upon the RES would not be appropriate. An internal workshop was organised to share this learning more widely within the council. A presentation by the equalities officer was given, which outlined the core differences between race and disability laws. A plenary discussion then focused on learning the lessons from the development process of the Race Equality Action Plan in order to minimise repetition and maximise council resources.

## **Outcomes and learning**

Following the internal workshop, a greater focus was placed upon the need to progress the DES action planning process as a distinct project, focusing upon progress towards disability equality and the meeting of the DED. Despite the Action Plan remaining in the early stages of development, it is believed that a more sophisticated understanding of the requirements of the process has been absorbed within the council. The foundations of a more robust action plan, and a greater sense of commitment towards its development, are in place as a result.

## **Challenging the myths of a bureaucratic culture**

### **Context and objectives**

In one particular local authority, production of the DES will require a shift in the way change is implemented, along with attendant changes in the culture and systems. In a prevailing heavily bureaucratic performance management and business planning culture, it may be difficult to stimulate a change to the local initiative and user involvement culture which the DES approach needs in order to be effective. Securing the involvement of disabled people in the design of a scheme requires both a set of processes and a mindset that makes this a priority. Where a DES is viewed as ‘another thing the council has to do’, the actual point of the approach has been lost.

It is about joint working and co-creation, not about another ‘service improvement’ strategy or action plan.

## **Process and approach**

There was a need to shift the focus from improving services to co-creating better outcomes. The conventional processes a council might use with regard to service management do not necessarily help to produce better outcomes. The heavy reliance on ‘action plans’ and ‘service improvement plans’ can hide the actual outcomes people experience in their lives and have a tendency to make an organisation look very busy without necessarily demonstrating positive outcomes. In this case, the plan itself becomes the focus rather than its implementation.

## **Outcomes and learning**

Enter any organisation as a newcomer and you quickly become aware of the stories and myths that contribute to its sense of identity. One of the problems this can create is a sense of being ‘stuck in the past’ and being content with what has been achieved rather than what might be achieved in the future. Given the future focus of the duty and the DES approach, the leaders of organisations need to give some thought to the stories and myths they tell and promote across the organisation. Leaders will find their stories repeated and unless they are careful they can create a sense of satisfaction with the status quo that may be very misplaced. The duty approach is not simply more of the same – it is about a very different way of operating and ‘being’ and therefore needs new stories and myths to help shape people’s thinking and attitudes.

Central departments need to rethink their roles in the light of the duty and the DES. Rather than getting into the details of schemes there is a need to encourage organisation, and system-wide learning. This involves reflecting on lessons learned and sharing these widely. It does require a more strategic perspective and a changed mindset. New skills in communicating, trust building and engagement will also be necessary. To achieve this may well require building the necessary capacity and capability to work in this way. The notion of organisational learning also implies that organisations are open to learning and not simply content with what they perceive themselves to have achieved historically, nor with what external plaudits or ratings they might have achieved.

## **Honesty about slow progress**

### **Context and objectives**

An urban local authority had been trying for a year and a half to set up a fully functioning DDA group, but had suffered from a number of setbacks and challenges. While the group is now up and running and is beginning to have an impact over the way the council tackles the disability equality agenda, progress has been much slower than it could have been.

### **Process and approach**

One of the principal causes of the difficulties encountered was the isolation (in the beginning) of the corporate equalities lead officer. While this officer did succeed in setting up a cross-departmental working group, the feeling was that there had been a missed opportunity through not involving disabled people or colleagues from other organisations to a sufficient degree. There was resistance to such involvement from senior levels in the council, for fear of exposing how far behind the council was on the disability equality agenda, but this had the result of seriously stalling progress. Once the cross-departmental working group was set up, there was the further challenge of ensuring sufficient regular attendance from key players.

### **Outcomes and learning**

Real progress has been made as a result of the compliance group, one notable example being the commissioning of a local voluntary association to conduct a 'mystery shopping' audit of key council transactions. However, the group was only able to have a real impact once a corporate equalities task group was set up (chaired first by an assistant director, then by a director) to tackle the mounting problem that was the council's lack of progress on equalities issues.

## **Using ‘small steps’ in action planning**

### **Context and objectives**

A small rural council was experiencing widespread reluctance and disengagement within the authority about the writing of their DES action plan. Many people felt that the task of writing it was overwhelming, and staff found it difficult to engage in the development of what they perceived to be such abstract and long-term goals. The equalities team was therefore keen to break down the process into smaller, clearly identifiable and more manageable chunks that staff would see as easily achievable steps towards success. It was hoped that this process would help to increase staff confidence in the action plan, and their ability to work towards it together.

### **Process and approach**

The initial focus of the action planning was on the importance of giving current policies and procedures a ‘makeover’, by looking at how current systems could be effectively employed to ensure that disability equality issues were considered. Staff were encouraged to think of ways in which they could improve the practices of their department, both currently and in the future, and then asked to feed this back to the equalities officer, who in turn would work it into the action plan. Staff were also encouraged to take ownership of each of their actions, and provide accurate and reasonable indications of timescales. The aim of the whole process was establishing realistic, achievable steps towards disability equality, rather than broad objectives that many staff found hard to engage with.

### **Outcomes and learning**

Although the Action Plan is still being developed, staff are now much more engaged with the process and are beginning to see improvements throughout the council. One example of this is that user satisfaction forms are now being examined more carefully, ensuring that any disability equality issues raised are fed straight into the action planning process, rather than simply being logged and stored on file.

## **Innovative methods of engagement in action planning**

### **Context and objectives**

In an effort to seek feedback and incorporate the comments of service users into the development of the DES, a small local authority in a rural area sent members of the local disability forum copies of their draft action plan, and asked them to provide general comments rather than involve them in its development from the very beginning as recommended by the DRC. The council had hoped that not being too prescriptive about what form the feedback should take would lead to richer, more detailed comments. However, the resulting feedback tended to be very general and lacked the specific focus or practical detail necessary to help produce clear actions and objectives. The council therefore felt it was necessary to adopt a more sophisticated and constructive feedback system to empower disabled people to challenge existing plans and foster active involvement in the latter stages of Action Plan development. A further objective was to cultivate more innovative methods of gaining feedback, without being restricted to simply commenting on the action plan.

### **Process and approach**

A ‘scenario building’ action-planning event was organised involving small focus groups made up from a range of service users and experienced facilitators. The focus of the session was to create an informal, creative environment in which service users were encouraged to describe their ideal outcomes relating to disability equality, projecting five years into the future. Facilitators were briefed thoroughly before the event to ensure that continual encouragement and acceptance of new ideas was maintained. The action planning headings against which scenarios were discussed included:

- eliminating harassment
- encouraging participation of disabled people in public life.

The focus was on ensuring that participants’ goals were turned into clear actions for the local authority to work into the plan. This practical focus meant that following the event, the priority outputs and suggested actions from each group could be easily collated and,

where possible, incorporated into the existing action plan.

### **Outcomes and learning**

Feedback following the action-planning event revealed that it was greatly enjoyed by all those who attended, leaving participants feeling valued after having the opportunity to inform the action planning to a greater extent. While the Action Plan is still in the final stages of development, informal feedback suggests that input from these scenario-building sessions has led to a more ambitious plan which is likely to be better received and, it is hoped, will help to achieve these outcomes.

## Conclusion

By focusing on the ‘real-life’ experiences of local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales, this resource has sought to help councils focus on:

- what outcomes they want to achieve with this duty
- what success will look like
- their particular responsibilities
- how they will know they’re making progress
- breaking this down into manageable stages.

Not all of the authorities whose experiences are described herein ‘got it right’ first time around, but all have shown the capacity to reflect upon their situation and focus on achieving real change for disabled people.

The Disability Equality Duty will mean that any public body will need to actively look at ways of ensuring that disabled people are treated equally. The duty is not necessarily about changes to buildings or adjustments for individuals, it’s all about including equality for disabled people into the culture of public authorities in practical and demonstrated ways. This means incorporating disabled people and disability equality into everything from the outset, rather than focusing on individualised responses to specific disabled people.

The Disability Rights Commission is urging local authorities not to just produce another ‘strategy’: good intentions that sit on the shelf and are never implemented, but to create a DES and Action Plan that is realistic and manageable. Every authority’s situation is unique and each council will need to develop and implement a DES and Action Plan that will achieve genuine improvements for disabled people within the context of their local area.

## **Local authorities involved**

Below is a list of the local authorities that have generously given of their time to contribute to this project, either through telephone interviews on one or a number of occasions, or direct involvement as champion authorities. The DRC and OPM would like to thank these authorities, as well as the many others who took part in the initial survey, for giving so willingly of their time and expertise.

### **England**

#### **London Councils**

Greater London Authority  
London Borough of Hackney (CHAMPION)  
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames  
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea  
Westminster City Council

#### **Metropolitan Councils**

Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council (CHAMPION)  
Manchester City Council  
Metropolitan Borough of Wirral  
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council  
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council  
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council  
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

#### **County Councils**

Cambridgeshire County Council  
Worcestershire County Council (CHAMPION)

#### **District Councils**

Ashford Borough Council  
Basingstoke and Dean Borough Council  
Bedford Borough Council  
Castle Morpeth Borough Council  
District of Easington Council (CHAMPION)  
Kennet District Council  
Lichfield District Council  
Mendip District Council (CHAMPION)  
Strafford Borough Council  
Warwick District Council

## **Unitary Councils**

**Isle of Wight Council**

**Wokingham District Council**

## **Scotland**

**City of Edinburgh Council**

**Clackmannanshire Council**

**Dumfries and Galloway Council**

**Glasgow City Council**

**South Ayrshire Council**

**Stirling Council**

**West Dunbartonshire Council**

## **Wales**

**Flintshire County Council**

**Monmouthshire County Council**

**Pembrokeshire County Council (CHAMPION)**

**Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**

## Contact details

Below is a list of people who contributed to this resource who kindly agreed to provide their contact details for further discussion about their approach to the development of their Disability Equality Scheme.

Specific queries about how the resource was put together, or any other aspects of the project itself should be directed to Phil Copestake, Research Manager at OPM

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