

General and specific statutory duties for public authorities

1. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005 requires public authorities to fulfil a general duty to:
 - (a) promote equality of opportunity between people with a disability and others;
 - (b) eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment;
 - (c) promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability;
 - (a) encourage participation in public life by people with a disability; and
 - (b) take steps to meet the needs of people with a disability, even if this requires more favourable treatment.
2. Under the official DDA definition, a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial or long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
3. The DDA also requires public authorities, as part of their specific duties, to establish and publish a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) by 4 December 2006. The DES must include an action plan and also set out:
 - (a) how people with a disability have been involved in developing the DES;
 - (b) arrangements for gathering information about our performance on promoting disability equality;
 - (c) what systems are in place for assessing the impact of the authority's activities on disability equality and improving these where necessary;
 - (d) details of how the authority will use the information gathered, especially to review the effectiveness of the action plan and prepare subsequent schemes.

Examples of SCDC services/support for people with a disability

1. Assisted refuse and recycling collections
2. Home improvements and disabled facilities grants
3. Housing services, including sheltered housing and floating support
4. Access statements are considered as part of the determination of planning applications
5. Have run a disability focus group to assist with the planning of Northstowe
6. Enable the provision of affordable housing to Lifetime Homes standard
7. Advice for people with a disability (eg, re:planning, housing, building control services)
8. Availability of home visits across a range of SCDC services (including those by the welfare & visiting officer who assists with applications for housing and council tax benefit)
9. Variety of practices within Revenues and Benefits to make it easier for applicants with a disability to contact the service and to receive the benefits to which they're entitled.
10. Polling stations are DDA compliant. Postal voting is arranged on request
11. Liaison with local disability groups, including the quarterly South Cambridgeshire Voluntary Forum and the Sawston Disability Forum
12. Disability awareness training for voluntary organisations
13. Joint work with other agencies who work with people with a disability (including social care and mental health teams)
14. Have worked with Cam-Sight to make a successful bid for NLDC funding to purchase software for SCDC's Community Access Points that will enable people with visual impairment to use the computers through magnified and voiceover software
15. Sign language interpreting available by a member of staff (training funded by SCDC)
16. Availability of SCDC information in large print or in audio format, on request
17. Wide range of information available on Council website – making it easier to access
18. Contact Centre makes it easier to get in touch with SCDC, 8am–8pm Monday-Saturday
19. Support for employees with a disability & promotion of equal opportunities in employment
20. Access features within the Cambourne offices, both for visitors and staff:
 - (a) level access from disabled parking spaces to building doors, with tactile paving slabs;
 - (b) public disabled access pass doors;
 - (c) high visibility edging to circular revolving entrance door & markings to adjacent glazing;
 - (d) disabled washroom facilities, including alarms (wall colour contrasts with the fixtures & fittings);
 - (e) disabled shower facilities;
 - (f) Braille buttons in lifts, plus voice information (eg, going up/down, which floor);
 - (g) colour-contrasted carpeting to identify walkways;
 - (h) hearing loops in public meeting rooms and headsets available from reception;
 - (i) fire refuge areas on emergency staircase landings with evac-chairs (fire evacuation instructions include provision for the disabled).

Please note: This is not an exhaustive list. More details are currently being compiled and will be included in the full draft Disability Equality Scheme.

Outline structure of Disability Equality Scheme

Part 1: Overview

- 1.1 Our commitment to promoting disability equality
- 1.2 Official requirements
- 1.3 How people with a disability have been involved in developing the Scheme
- 1.4 Summary of the Scheme
- 1.5 Implementation arrangements

Part 2: The local context

- 2.1 Disability issues in South Cambridgeshire: demographic information
- 2.2 South Cambridgeshire DC: objectives, priorities, policies and services
- 2.3 Future issues facing South Cambridgeshire

Part 3: Building on current practices

- 3.1 SCDC services and support for people with a disability
- 3.2 Views from people with personal experience of disability issues in South Cambs
- 3.3 Scope for improvement

Part 4: Disability Equality Action Plan 2006 – 2009

- 4.1 Assessing the impact of policies and services on people with a disability
- 4.2 Greater consultation and engagement with local disability groups
- 4.3 Better external communication on disability issues
- 4.4 Use of more detailed research information and performance monitoring
- 4.5 Employment practices
- 4.6 More training for both councillors and staff

Current profile of disability issues in South Cambridgeshire

1. The 2001 Census has revealed that:
 - (a) 13.3% of local residents have a limiting long-term illness (LLTI);
 - (b) 2.3% of 16-74 year olds in the district are permanently sick or disabled;
 - (c) 1.3% of local residents provide unpaid care for 50 hours + per week.
2. Disability seems to be is strongly related to age.
 - (a) The Public Health and Health Inequalities Data Set shows that 16% of the population were aged 65 or over (8% were over 75).
 - (b) Limiting long-term illnesses are particularly prevalent amongst Bangladeshi men and Pakistani women in the county, given the age profile of these ethnic minorities. This is particularly relevant in view of the significant Asian populations in Girton, Milton and Teversham.
3. The Traveller Needs Assessment 2005–10 has highlighted particular issues affecting the largest ethnic minority in the district (1% of the population).
 - (a) 44% of English Gypsy respondents and 47% of Irish Travellers reported close family/household members with health problems, and/or children with disabilities (including epilepsy, blindness, deafness, kidney disease, genetic conditions, and learning disability).
 - (b) Health status was poorest for Gypsies /Travellers on council sites (although this may reflect the older cohort on such sites).
4. Market research indicates that people with a disability tend to contact SCDC more and complain more. The 2003/04 Best Value general household survey found that 64% of respondents with a disability contacted the Council over 2 years compared to 57% without disabilities. 25% of respondents with a disability complained to SCDC in the previous 12 months compared to 13% of all respondents.
5. In 2005/06, 8% of the Council's staff declared that they had a disability.
6. It is also worth bearing in mind that the 33% population growth in South Cambridgeshire, expected over the next decade, may change the demographics of the district – possibly with more disability needs.

Consultation with local disability groups

Notes from meeting of South Cambridgeshire Voluntary Forum – 18 October 2006

1. What is the scale/type of disability needs in the district?

- “Take the number of people with a disability who use services, and then double it.”
- “There is going to be a huge jump in the number of people with a disability who want to do things and be more independent, and who know their rights.”
- “Support is needed to enable people to live in their own homes.”
- “There is going to be a big increase in the elderly population. More community facilities will be needed to care for them. People will be looked after more at home.”
- “Levels of infant disability aren’t decreasing. Advances in medical science mean that people who - in the past - might have died at birth, now survive but with disabilities.”
- “There are 10 million people in this country with hearing loss (including 87% of those who are aged 75 or over).”

2. Which SCDC services do you think are most relevant to promoting disability equality and helping to meet the needs of disabled people in South Cambs?

- “All services. Waste collection, for example.”
- “Housing and access”.
- “Access and design. Planning services aren’t always co-operative. Plan vetting isn’t yet in place.”

3. What are the barriers faced by disabled people in the district?

- “Public buildings, particularly those without hearing loops. Also, noisy environments, particularly if you’ve got tinnitus and hearing loss.”
- “Be aware that wheelchairs are getting much bigger because they do much more. It’s important to make sure that there is enough space for them.”
- “Not bothering to go to places or to attend meetings because it’s too tiring, especially if you’re elderly and have a disability.”
- “Disabled people are getting too tired to fight injustices.”
- “Attitudes and lack of knowledge. We don’t expect council staff to be experts, but we would like them to use our expertise.”
- “If you’re going to do staff training, please make use of people who have a disability, not just those who think they know what it is like to be disabled.”

4. What’s SCDC doing well to promote disability equality? What aren’t we doing well?

- “You can get into South Cambs Hall and to the reception desk, but is there a hearing loop there?.” (The answer is ‘yes’).
- “More and more, it’s getting difficult to find space to have meetings at South Cambs Hall. When meetings have to be arranged elsewhere, it is important for staff to make sure that the location is DDA compliant. If there isn’t a hearing loop there or it can’t be used properly, then that’s actually against the law.”
- “Make consultations with the voluntary sector DDA compliant.”
- “Statutory sector organisations don’t use local disability groups as much as they should. Disability groups are happy to help.”

5. How could SCDC improve, within the resource constraints facing the Council? What are the three most important changes that the District Council could make as part of the Disability Equality Scheme action plan?

- “You can buy a mobile hearing loop for less than £100.”
- “Make sure that proper meeting etiquette is observed at meetings. Don’t speak over one another.”
- “Get people to ask for advice. My disability group would be happy to do your training.”
- “Use proper mix of upper and lower case letters – this benefits visually impaired people.”
- “Get plan vetting in place quickly.”
- “The most effective things are cheapest. Being sued for non-compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act isn’t.”