

Better Homes, Brighter Futures



WIGAN & LEIGH
HOUSING

Better Homes, Brighter Futures

Disability Equality Action Plan

2007/8



This information can be made available in large print or other formats. Please telephone 01942 486538 for more information.

People with hearing difficulties who have a Minicom can contact us through the typetalk operator by putting 18001 01942 in front of any of our telephone numbers. We can also be contacted by sending a mobile phone text to our contact centre on 07797806546



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|----------------------------|--|
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| اردو | اگر آپ انگریزی پڑھتے یا بولتے نہیں ہیں اور ان معلومات کو سمجھنے میں مدد کی ضرورت ہے تو برائے مہربانی ہماری لینگویج لائن کو 01942 488435 پر فون کریں تاکہ ہم آپ سے کسی ترجمان کی مدد سے گفتگو کریں۔ |

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1. About Wigan & Leigh Housing

Wigan and Leigh Housing is a 'not for profit' organisation managing the housing stock of around 24,000 homes on behalf of Wigan Council. Our main role is to: allocate Council housing; manage rent arrears; organise repairs and improvements to properties; deal with estate management issues such as anti-social behaviour.

We also provide a range of other services for tenants and applicants for Council housing which include: an advice and assessment service for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness; providing temporary accommodation for homeless people; support services for tenants needing extra help with their tenancy, for example young people, those with mental health issues, refugees; an active tenant participation team to make sure as many tenants and residents as possible are involved in the housing service.

As an organisation we serve and work with a wide range of people and organisations. So it is very important that we provide services fairly and with respect.

2. Our commitment and approach to Equality & Diversity

A Fair Service & Respect for All

At Wigan & Leigh Housing we are committed to Equality & Diversity. We are determined to make sure that:

- our policies, procedures and working practices, in both employment and service delivery reflect this, and
- we comply with legal requirements and good practice guidance such as the Sex Discrimination, Disability, and Race Relations Acts, and the CRE Code of Practice.

All our policies and procedures will be applied fairly, consistently and respectfully to all people, making Wigan Borough a place for all.

Turning our commitment into a reality

Our Equality & Diversity Strategy explains what we think are the things we need to get right to provide "a fair service and respect for all".

One of our key tasks in the strategy is to make sure we meet our legal obligations and good practice standards in employment and service delivery.

The last decade has seen a substantial increase in legislation aimed at improving the rights of a wide range of people. This includes people from different races and backgrounds, disabled people, older people, equality between men and women, people who have different religious beliefs, and sexual orientations.

In 2001 the government introduced a different type of law that, for the first time, required all public bodies to actively promote race equality and eliminate discrimination and racial harassment. Proactive duties have since developed for other groups, for example a disability equality duty which came into force in December 2006, and a gender duty which comes into force in April 2007.

In 2007 all three duties will be enforceable by a new body, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights. The new body will also deal with other areas of equality, including age, religion and belief, and sexual orientation.

Whilst not all the new duties fall on Wigan & Leigh Housing, such as the need to develop an overarching Equality Scheme, which is a Council responsibility, many of them do and we are committed to supporting any Equality Scheme that Wigan Council develop.

As part of our commitment to meet our legal requirements and support Wigan Council in the delivery of Equality Schemes, Wigan & Leigh Housing is producing a range of Equality Action Plans.

These plans explain in simple terms what our equality duties are and how we are going about meeting them. They include what we have done so far and our plans for the next twelve months. We are sharing these plans with people from, or who represent, or who have an interest in the people that are meant to benefit from such plans.

This Plan is about Disability Equality

It is our hope that people will tell us what they think of these plans; what we are getting right, and what we are getting wrong, as well as helping us to think of more ways in which disabled people can get involved.

How to let us know:

By post:

Equality & Diversity Team
Wigan & Leigh Housing
Freepost WN 5327
PO Box 48
Wigan
WB1 1ZY

By phone:

Equality & Diversity Team 01942 486538
Tenant Participation Free phone: 0800 389 7652

By e-mail: equality@walh.co.uk

By Text: 07797806546

or to staff at any of our offices

3. Disability – the legal requirements

The first legislation for disabled people was the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995.

The Act defines a disabled person as “someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”.

This includes people who have:

- Learning difficulties
- Long term debilitation illnesses (including some everyday health problems)
- Mental Health Conditions
- Mobility problems
- Those who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Visual Impairments

The Act aimed to end the discrimination which many disabled people face. It gave disabled people rights in the areas of:

- employment
- access to goods, facilities and services
- buying or renting land or property

The employment rights and first rights of access came into force on 2 December 1996. Further rights of access came into force on 1 October 1999. The rights of access (and that service providers are required to make “reasonable adjustments” to their premises) came into force in October 2004.

Under Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act, it is against the law for a provider of goods, facilities or services, or a landlord or other person who is disposing of, or managing, premises, to discriminate against someone because of their disability.

The underlying purpose of Part 3 of the Act is to promote inclusive service provision and to encourage systemic change in the provision of services. Thus it is unlawful to refuse to provide a service, or to provide a different standard of service, or to provide the service on different terms to disabled people.

These provisions are intended to prevent disabled people from being excluded from services that the general public can access, or from being treated differently when they seek to access those services, including with regard to the provision of information.

Where a physical feature makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to access a service, the options will be to remove the feature, alter it, provide a reasonable means of avoiding it, or to provide a reasonable alternative method of making the service available. The Code recommends that the best approach to meeting the duties under Part 3 of the DDA is to adopt an inclusive approach, making services available to everyone in the same way.

The 1995 Act was amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. From 4 December 2006 public authorities were given new duties in respect of disabled people.

These duties are detailed in the Disability Equality Duty, in the form of general and specific duties.

This document is our way of showing how we are complying with the Disability Discrimination Act, particularly the general duties, and how we are supporting Wigan Council in meeting its responsibilities under the specific duties brought in from December 2006.

In approaching Disability Equality, Wigan & Leigh Housing subscribes to the “social model of diversity”. This suggests that rather than being disabled by a medical condition or label, what really disables people are the attitudes of others and the way in which society is run. From this view, disability is due to a complex form of institutional discrimination as fundamental to our society as sexism, racism or heterosexism.

4. The Disability Equality Scheme Duties and how we intend to fulfil them.

4.a) The specific duties

Public bodies that are subject to the specific duty must publish a Disability Equality Scheme (which includes a set of essential elements) demonstrating how they intend to fulfil their Disability Equality Duties.

Responsibility for producing an Equality Scheme rests with Wigan Council. The Council has done so and we support their aims and objectives, contribute to joint initiatives and the sharing of information.

However, we think that the essential elements include some general good practice that excellent organisations should be taking account of. These include:

1. Involving disabled people in developing improvement plans.
2. Having ways of collecting information on, and reviewing the effectiveness of, the organisation performance on achieving disability equality.
3. Arrangements for assessing the impact of our activities on disability equality.

What we have done and are doing about these good practice elements are included in section 5 and in the progress and plans section which starts on page 14.

This plan will be updated at the end of each financial year and subject to a major review when the Council reviews their Equality Scheme – every three years.

4.b) The general duties

The general duties apply to all public authorities, including organisations who carry out certain functions which a public authority might carry out. Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) such as Wigan & Leigh Housing are included in this category.

The general duty requires that when carrying out their day to day work, the relevant organisations should have due regard to the need to:

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people.
- Take steps to meet disabled peoples needs, even if this requires more favourable treatment.
- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disability.
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people.
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

Examples of how Wigan & Leigh Housing are giving due regard to each item in the above list are given in the progress and plans section below.

5. How we gather and use information on disability.

5.1 Service delivery & employment.

Information on customers

Wigan & Leigh Housing have been collecting information on the differences that make up our customers "social identity" (age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexuality) for a number of years.

In June 2004 we sent a questionnaire to all Council tenants asking them to share with us information on the various elements that make up their "social identity". Approximately one third replied.

In October 2005 we wrote to all the people who had told us that they were disabled asking for more information on their particular disability and if there were any special arrangements that we could make, to help them more easily access our services. For example getting information in large print or formats other than writing.

This and information from other surveys and sources has been put into our computer system to make up a Customer Profile, which is used to check that we are delivering services fairly.

We are encouraging the customers who have not given us this information to do so and have extended the survey by asking the same questions to all new customers.

Some examples of what we have used this information for are included in our Customer Profile. (www.walh.co.uk).

Information on employees

At the same time as we were asking our customers to provide us with information, we asked similar questions of our employees. Almost all of them have given us this information which we use to make sure that our employment practices are applied fairly at all stages of the employment process: interview, appointment, promotion disciplinary and grievance process.

We also have access to the Council's Corporate Personnel Management Information System which will be used to monitor the details of:

- applicants for employment, training and promotion,
- staff who receive training,
- staff who benefit or suffer detriment as a result of its performance assessment procedures,
- staff who are involved in grievance procedures, or subject of disciplinary procedures,
- staff who cease employment each year.

5.2 Assessing the impact of what we are doing on disability equality.

We already have a number of tools to assess the potential impact of our service activity on a wide range of people.

These include:

Relevance Reviews

Relevance Reviews were originally about identifying the services that were likely to have the greatest potential to affect how well services are provided for other than White: British racial groups. At Wigan & Leigh Housing we have updated them to include the identification of services that will have the greatest affect on a wide range of people: young and old, disabled people, men and women, different religious groups, gay people.

Relevance Reviews indicate the services that we must pay the greatest attention to in our plans to improve things. They look at similar issues to Service Needs Assessments.

Service Needs Assessments

In following the Equality Standard for Local Government WALH has adopted Wigan Council's method for assess the impact of services on different types of people. The method for doing this is called a Service Needs Assessment.

To do a Service Needs Assessment we look at all the information we have on individual services to see if:

- we have made any special arrangements for the different groups of people named above,

- anything we do disadvantages these groups,
- we can identify any unmet needs, for example providing hearing loops and signers, for people with sensory disability at consultation events.

We need to be sure that the information is good enough to answer these questions and if it is not, we work out ways of collecting or improving it.

Then we share what we have found, how we think we should improve and which improvements we think are the most important, with the people affected. The agreed improvements, objectives and targets are added to our service improvement plans.

Service Needs Assessments are carried out every two years. Relevance Reviews must be carried out every three years.

Diversity Impact Assessments

Impact Assessments are carried out whenever we take on new areas of work, or change things we already do. We look at how the new work or changes may affect different groups such as disabled people, to make sure that no one is unfairly disadvantaged. (See www.walh.co.uk).

That an Impact Assessment has been carried out, and how it has changed the way we are intending to work, is reported to the relevant service area steering or involvement group. When the group has agreed the changes, they are added to the service improvement plan. Many of these steering/involvement groups included customer representatives.

We also make sure that a wide range of people are consulted about what we are proposing and whenever possible include their suggestions in what we do.

Examples of the actions that have resulted from our Impact Assessments are included on our website at www.walh.co.uk.

The progress and action plan in section 6. provides an initial audit of Wigan & Leigh Housing's performance on Disability issues, and our plans for the future. It will be shared with people from, or who represent, or who have an interest in disabled people. In the first instance to see how it can be improved both as a document, and a process.

Thereafter any agreed plan will be shared, along with a progress report, on an annual basis with WALH Board, and any groups or individual who requests a copy.

Customers and disabled employee's will be asked to judge and make comment on how effective the Company is in meeting the Disability Duty. Their comments and copies of any progress plans will be included in the Company's Equality & Diversity "Best Practice Evidence File".

5.3 Procurement and information sharing.

Wigan & Leigh Housing is part of the Wigan Borough Partnership, and works with a number of agencies, voluntary, private, and statutory organisations including the Primary Care Trust, the Police, and the various departments of Wigan Council.

How we conduct ourselves and the way in which we work has an effect on a wide range of people and organisations.

It's about setting standards, being a good example and treating everyone with respect. Making sure that services are provided fairly and with respect is the right thing to do. It's good for the community and it's good for the company.

We have a more direct influence on a number of organisations through our procurement policy. An assessment of contractors and partners Equality & Diversity policies (how they will meet individual needs) is included as part of our procurement process. We also hold information sharing days to ensure that the best practice is widely shared.

6. Our progress and plans for the future.

The following pages provide details of:

- Wigan & Leigh Housing's Disability Equality Duties,
- what we have done to meet them,
- how we are planning to improve things over the next twelve months.

We need to make sure that we are meeting these duties, and welcome your comments on how well you think we are doing, along with any suggestions as to how we could improve our approach.

How to let us know:

By post:

Equality & Diversity Team
Wigan & Leigh Housing
Freepost WN 5327
PO Box 48
Wigan
WB1 1ZY

By phone:

Equality & Diversity Team 01942 486538
Tenant Participation Free phone: 0800 389 7652

By e-mail: equality@walh.co.uk

By Text: 07797806546

or to staff at any of our offices.

Wigan & Leigh Housing: Disability Equality
An overview of our progress and plans for the future

The Duty:

- **Promoting equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people.**
- **Taking steps to meet disabled peoples needs, even if this requires more favourable treatment.**

What we have done or are doing

We:

- have been a Disability Symbol User since 2002. This was reviewed in 2005/6 by Jobcentre Plus, who confirmed that we comply with the symbol user standard.
- use legal powers to provide training opportunities for disabled people – we set aside and filled two supported apprentice placements for young disabled people in 2005.
- have surveyed our employees, and developed an employee disability profile.
- monitor and report on the number of disabled people:
 - we already employ
 - who are applying for jobs
 - who are involved in discipline and grievance cases

We do this to identify possible discrimination of disabled people entering or moving through the employment process. Then we set and report on improvement targets, and ways of removing any barriers. Our Management Team, Board and customer involvement groups regularly look at these reports to ensure we are treating disabled people equally.

- have provide a number of adaptations to a range of disabled employees.
- asked our disabled tenants what special arrangements we can make to help them access services more easily, and (with their permission) shared this information with employees, contractors and partners.

What we are planning to do over the next twelve months

We will:

- work with the disabled/supported apprentices to make sure the placements were successful and that we learnt from the initiative.
- complete the job evaluation scheme ahead of our equal pay review.
- ask those disabled customers who have not already done so, to provide us with more detailed information about their disability and the arrangements we can make to give them better access to our services.
- include additional guidance to staff on how to provide a better service for disabled people.

The Duty:

- **Eliminating discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act.**

What we have done or are doing

Access to buildings

We have:

- made a number of “adjustments” (induction loops, ramps, etc) for disabled people in several of our offices.
- had our other offices, and the multi-storey properties, Homeless Persons Hostel, and sheltered schemes that we manage for Wigan Council, inspected by a specialist consultant to identify the adjustments that they require.
- developed an accessible buildings compliance plan and produced a position statement (see our compliance targets on page 20.) which is monitored on a regular basis.

Access to services

We have:

- consulted our customers on how they access our front line services and as a result set up a Contact Centre that offers home visits.
- had external organisations validate that we have achieved successive levels of the Equality Standard for Local Government - we are currently at level 3.
- developed a Customer Profile that is enabling us to:
 - carry out monitoring across a wide range of our services (current monitoring has indicated that disabled people are not treated less fairly than others, however we have identified the need to publicise certain services such as Furnished tenancies more effectively to disabled people).
 - collect information specifically on the individual needs of disabled people and (with their permission) share this with contractors and partners.
- changed our procurement procedures to make sure that people who we purchase from and who do work on our behalf follow best practice in respect of vulnerable and disabled people.
- made sure our managers have a number of diversity tools to check that any new proposals or changes are not disadvantaging disabled people. These include:
 - Relevance Reviews
 - Impact Assessments
 - Service Needs Assessments
 - Consultation guidance.
 - Diversity monitoring.
- arranged “best practice” and service improvement days with our partners and contractors.

What we have done or are doing (continued).

Access to information

We:

- provide hearing loops in our buildings and use mobile units at group meetings, involvement events and with individuals.
- provide palantypists at all of our major events.
- provide key information in a range of alternative formats: audiotape, CD, Braille.
- arrange for other information to be provided in alternative formats and/or arrange personal visits to provide information and assistance.
- advertise the availability of information in other formats and that Mincom users can contact officers direct through the BT Typetalk system as well as through a number of service specific mobile phone text numbers.

What we are planning to do over the next twelve months

We will:

- ensure that even more of our public buildings are accessible.
- involve disabled customers in checking that our managers are taking into account the needs of disabled people.
- ask more disabled people to let us know what their individual needs are so that we can look at meeting them.
- make sure our communication plans include for the needs of disabled people.
- identify people to champion disabled people on our customer involvement groups e.g. Area Forums.
- train Board Members and employees on our disability duties.
- improve our diversity monitoring e.g.: extend diversity monitoring to our complaints system, and put copies of our monitoring reports on our customer website.

The Duty:

- **Eliminating harassment of disabled people that is related to their disability.**

What we have done or are doing

We:

- collect information on, and regularly report what we are doing about, Hate Incidents (an incident committed against someone because of their sex, race, religion, disability or sexual orientation) to the Company's Board.
- Ask neighbour nuisance complainants to let us know if they have a disability, so that we can make arrangements to meet their particular needs: e.g. using a Dictaphone instead of having to write diary sheets, using statements if the complainant is unable to attend court because of a disability.
- Analyse how many complainants are disabled and where such incidents occur.

What we are planning to do over the next twelve months

We will:

- Produce more comprehensive Hate Crime Board reports and make sure that they are shared with customers, partners and other interested organisations.
- Make use of new and existing powers (e.g. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders) to eliminate harassment of people that is related to their disability.
- Research, develop and implement support packages for victims and witnesses.

The Duty:

- **Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people**

What we have done or are doing

We:

- made our working with disabled people training compulsory for all employees.
- have trained over 200 employees on how to work with disabled people in a respectful, courteous and positive way.
- display the service standards that disabled people should expect from us, and against which our performance can be assessed, in all our public offices.
- encourage contractors to develop a positive attitude to a wide range of groups including disabled people through our procurement practices and best practice events.

What we are planning to do over the next twelve months

We will:

- raise employees awareness of the positive contribution made to society by disabled people.
- review our disability service standards.

The Duty:

➤ **Encouraging participation by disabled people in public life**

What we have done or are doing

We:

- have written a hard to reach strategy to make sure that we do all we can to involve a wide range of people, including disabled people, in what we do and how we do it.
- asked all our tenant and resident groups to undertake a diversity survey of their membership and encourage a wide range of people to get involved.
- have enabled disabled tenants to set up a Disability Action Group and consulted them on our disability plans.
- encourage disabled people's to join our consultation and decision making groups.
- have established a Supporting Customers Working Group (that includes disabled people) that is looking at:
 - identifying gaps in support services
 - developing services to meet needs
 - sharing information on needs and available services with employees and contractors
 - checking how well we are performing
 - investigating and sharing best practice
- offer additional assistance e.g. transport to meetings, tenant conferences, consultation and other events to people with mobility problems.

What we are planning to do over the next twelve months

We will:

- Undertake a survey of, and wherever reasonable meet the individual needs of people on our customer involvement and decision making groups.
- encourage even more disabled customers to make suggestions and get involved in helping us to improve our services.
- ensure that disabled people are given the opportunity to take part in “mystery shopping” and other service checking exercises.

7. Our Disability Performance Targets 2007/8

Disability Discrimination Act compliance

| Type | Ref no. | Frequency | Details | Actual 2006/7 | Target 2007/8 |
|------|---------|-----------|---|---------------|---------------|
| BV | 156 | Annual | Proportion of public buildings with access for the disabled | 55% | 78% |

Employment Targets

| Type | Ref no. | Frequency | Details | Actual 2006/7 | Target 2007/8 |
|------|---------|-----------|---|---------------|---------------|
| BV | 11(c) | Annual | Percentage of top 5% of staff who have a disability | 4.8% | 4.8% |
| BV | 16 | Annual | The percentage of employees declaring that they meet the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 disability definition | 2.0% | 3.2% |

8. Please let us know what you think

We are determined to make sure that our services are delivered fairly and with respect to everyone. Please let us know how well you think we are doing by contacting the Equality & Diversity Team.

Want to get more involved?

We are looking for all types of people to join our consultation and decision making groups. If you want to get more involved then let us know by contacting the Tenant Participation Team.

How to let us know:

By post:

Equality & Diversity Team
Wigan & Leigh Housing
Freepost WN 5327
PO Box 48
Wigan
WB1 1ZY

By phone:

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