



CONNSWATER HOMES LTD

DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

FOREWORD

This Disability Action Plan is an important document. It is a statement of the Associations commitment to and its proposals for fulfilling the statutory obligations in compliance with Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006.

The Act places new duties on public authorities when carrying out their functions to have regard to the need:

- To provide positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- To encourage participation by disabled people in public life

This plan is also important as it outlines how disability issues can be more effectively mainstreamed by the Association ensuring that they become integral to the whole range of policy areas and decision making structures within the Association.

Signed

Chief Executive

This disability Action Plan can be obtained from Connswater Homes Ltd in alternative formats including large print, Braille, electronically, or on disk.

If you would like a copy in an alternative format please contact:

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1. Introduction & Purpose of the Plan

Disability has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities and the Governments primary objective is to improve rights and opportunities for disabled people in a fair and inclusive society.

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006, public authorities when carrying out their functions must have due regard to:

- The need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and
- The need to encourage participation by disabled people in public life

Connswater Homes Ltd is fully committed to complying with these duties which came into effect from the 1st of January 2007 and ensure that the provisions of the Act are monitored over time keeping the duties central to the whole range of policy decision making within the Association.

The Purpose of this Disability Action Plan is to set out how the Association proposes to fulfil the two disability duties in relation to the carrying out of its functions.

2. Connswater Homes Ltd – duties and responsibilities

The Association was first registered in 1977. It exists to provide good quality homes at affordable rents in a secure and attractive environment. Where possible those involved strive to build homes that so far as possible sustain communities through innovative design and adaptability.

The key objectives of the Association are:

- To build homes to the highest standards permitted within funding constraints
- To provide a comprehensive quality management service whilst demonstrating value for money
- To invest in training and technology to ensure efficiency
- To ensure the long term financial viability of the Association
- To ensure that properties are adequately maintained through their anticipated lifespan
- To provide a balanced mix of properties to meet the aspirations of existing and prospective tenants
- To support diversification of tenure
- To promote opportunities for the involvement of local residents in the Association's activities
- To work in partnership with voluntary and statutory agencies to support the efforts of local community groups in areas where we work

The Board of Management of the Association comprises the Chair and currently nine other members. Prospective shareholding members are sought via public advertisement or by invitation to ensure a balanced skills base that enables the formation and continuation of a competent board of arrangement. Membership is open to all sections of the community as the Association seeks to ensure that the membership reflects the communities it serves. The Board ensures that a defined number of shares are available for tenants and those showing an interest at community level.

The functions of the Association for purposes of the Act include its powers and duties in connection with:

- Corporate Functions – Governance
- Finance & Administration
- Housing Development and new schemes
- Housing Management
- IT
- Personnel

In implementing and supporting the above functions the Association has developed and adopted a wide range of policies.

3. Commitment to Effective Implementation of the Disability Action Plan

Connswater Homes Ltd is committed to effective implementation of the Disability Action Plan within the organisation. Overall responsibility for developing policy on how this will be achieved lies with the Board of Management and the Chief Executive.

It is the Associations intention to include targets and objectives into its corporate and business plans relating to the two disability duties. Progress on meeting objectives will be monitored and reported upon on a quarterly and annual basis.

Examples of ways to monitor progress and the effectiveness of measures taken will include Tenant Satisfaction Surveys, NICORE forms, Staff meetings, Training & Evaluation.

A report will be included in the Associations Annual Report to chart progress to date with meeting the objectives relating to the two disability duties. In addition an annual report on the implementation of the two disability duties will be forwarded to the Equality Commission in line with statutory obligations.

4. Internal Arrangements & Effective Engagement

Connswater Homes Ltd is currently made up of three main departments each headed by a manager. All departments are answerable to the Chief Executive and the Board of Management and are as follows:

- Housing Management
- Development
- Finance & Personnel

The Housing Management section takes responsibility for all aspects of estate management including void management, rent control, allocations, and tenancy matters for all of the Associations stock.

The Development Section has responsibility for the development of new housing schemes, locating sites, obtaining statutory approvals for same, and also includes the management of the maintenance services provided by the Association.

Finance and Personnel has overall responsibility for accounting and financial budgeting/planning matters as well as responsibility for personnel matters within the organisation.

Connswater Homes Ltd is committed to effective engagement with disabled people in the formulation, implementation and review of this Disability Action Plan.

5. Annual Report & Five Year review

Connswater Homes Ltd will prepare a report annually on the implementation of the Disability Action Plan. This report will be included with the Annual Progress Report that is issued to the Equality Commission annually on the implementation of the Associations Equality Scheme. A copy of the report will be made available on the Associations Web Site.

The Association will carry out a five year review of the Disability Action Plan implementing any changes necessary and submitting a revised plan if necessary to the Equality Commission.

6. Consultation

Connswater Homes Ltd is committed to carrying out meaningful consultation on the development of the Disability Action Plan and subsequently on the fulfilment of the two disability duties.

The Association will endeavour to obtain the views of disabled people and other bodies working with disabled people on issues around participation and involvement as well as developing ways to obviously and discreetly promote positive attitudes towards disabled people.

To this end it is the Associations intention to promote and hold a consultation event to:

- Identify barriers faced by disabled people in participation in public life in general and specifically any barriers they have encountered in relation to their dealings with the Association.
- Identify circumstances in the past where the Association has not promoted positive attitudes towards disabled people and also identify opportunities to promote positive attitudes in future.
- Set priorities and in time monitor and review the effectiveness of measures taken.

The Association will remain open to consultation with any organisation that can assist in fulfilling the obligations contained within the plan.

The consultation document will be made available on the Associations web site for views of individuals and organisations who visit the site.

The consultation process will run for 8 weeks from Friday the 27th April 2007 after which time any feedback will be reviewed and relevant changes made in time to forward the plan to the Equality Commission by the deadline of the 30th June 2007.

7. Action Measures

Connswater Homes has already actively undertaken a number of measures to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and assist them in participating in public life through its work in connection with Section 75. Examples include:

- Awareness training to staff on issues around disability
- Provision of disabled adaptations to tenants who have disabilities
- Development of new schemes incorporating homes designed to Lifetime Home standard and specific accommodation for people with disabilities.
- An office move during 2006 to an office that is fully DDA compliant and accessible by all.
- Facilities to provide information and communicate in alternative formats

Included below are a list of measures the Association intends to take in relation to fulfilling the two disability duties:

- Policy screening to include additional questions on issues around the two disability duties
- Provide training to staff on the two disability duties
- Review all policies to identify and assess any significant issues relating to the two disability duties
- Include Disability awareness in staff inductions
- Appoint an officer with responsibility for the implementation of the two disability duties as well as responsibility for Section 75 work.
- Engage with organisations and disabled people to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in Public life

8. Timescale for the Implementation of the Action Measures & Performance Indicators / Targets.

Connswater Homes Ltd is aware of the need to monitor progress in relation to the implementation of the Disability Action Plan to ensure that the disability duties are being met. An annual review of the plan will go some way towards monitoring and review and will help in the developing targets and Key Performance Indicators for the next year whilst detailing any significant outcomes relevant to the review period.

Outlined below are some of the performance indicators that could be implemented to assess progress in relation to the implementation of the two disability duties.

- Employee surveys to identify training needs around the disability duties
- Provide training to new staff on disability awareness within the first 3 months of employment
- Review all policies where an adverse impact on those with disabilities have been identified
- Information circulated to tenants asking for comments in communications sent out by the Association.

9. Publication of the Disability Action Plan

The Association will publicise the availability of its Disability Action Plan through staff training, web site, and through the Associations Newsletter which is distributed to all tenants.

APPENDIX 1

MEASURES TO BE TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT DISABILITY DUTIES

ACTION MEASURE	RESPONSIBILITY	IMPACT
<p><u>Mainstreaming</u> An additional question on the screening pro forma to assess the significance of the disability duties.</p>	Housing Officer	Better promotion of Equality for disabled people
<p><u>Training & Guidance</u> Provide training on disability duties to Board, senior managers, and front line staff. Incorporate Disability Awareness in staff inductions</p>	Chief Executive / Housing Officer	Increased awareness of disability duties Promotion of positive attitudes towards disabled people
<p><u>Internal Awareness</u> Review of existing policies, practices and procedures</p>	Housing Officer	Promotion of positive attitudes towards disabled people
<p><u>Communication</u> Work with other organisations who seek to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people</p>	Housing Officer	Promotion of positive attitudes towards disabled people
<p><u>Other Measures</u> Appoint an Officer to progress the disability duties</p>	Chief Executive	Increased awareness of disability duties

APPENDIX 2

TIMESCALE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION MEASURES

YEAR 1 – JULY 2007-JUNE 2008	
MEASURE	ACTION
Mainstreaming	Add disability screening to S75 screening pro forma
Training and Guidance	Provide disability awareness training for staff and Board members Incorporate Disability Awareness in staff inductions
Internal Awareness	Appoint an officer to progress disability duties and progress Section 75 work
Other Measures	Prepare annual report on the implementation of the Plan

YEAR 2 – JULY 2008 – JUNE 2009	
MEASURE	ACTION
Mainstreaming	-
Training and Guidance	Ensure all staff and Board members are updated, as required, with disability awareness and the Associations disability duties
Internal Awareness	
Communication	Work with other organisations to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
Other Measures	Incorporate additional Key performance indicators based on findings of year 1 review Prepare annual report on Year 2 implementation of the Plan

APPENDIX 3



DISABILITY ACTION PLANS Development & Consultation Processes

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) is the umbrella body for the 36 registered and 7 non-registered housing associations in Northern Ireland.

All designated housing associations participated in a joint approach to the development of Disability Action Plan process co-ordinated by the NIFHA. The Federation assisted members in this process by:

- Developing a housing specific response template to ensure consistency of Disability Action Plans across the 35 designated associations
- organising pre-consultation training facilitated by Disability Action
- publicising the 8 week consultation period in the three main Northern Ireland daily papers
- issuing a composite disk containing the draft Disability Action Plans of all designated housing associations to the disability organisations listed at Appendix A (additional discs were also issued on request)
- Representing the housing association movement at joint consultation events hosted by the NI Housing Executive
- Acting as a conduit for information and consultee responses

Public Consultation

Designated housing associations consulted on their Disability Action Plans between Friday, 27 April and Friday 22 June 2007.

Associations took comments or detailed responses from following Consultees into consideration when producing the final version of their Disability Action Plan:

- Carers NI
- Disability Action
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive events on 23 March & 10 May (participating organisations are listed at Appendix B)
- RNID
- Tenants & staff of the respective association
- Stakeholder organisations as listed by each association

NIFHA and its members would like to take this opportunity to record their thanks to all individuals and/or organisation that took the trouble to share their experience and submit their comments.

APPENDIX 4



LIST OF ORGANISATIONS THAT RECEIVED DRAFT DISABILITY ACTION PLAN DISK – 27 APRIL 2007

Action Mental Health
Age Concern Northern Ireland
Barnardos
British Deaf Association (NI)
Brainwaves Northern Ireland
Carers Northern Ireland
Child Poverty Action Group (NI)
Blind Centre for NI
Community Development & Health Network (NI)
Disability Action
Down's Syndrome Association
Employers' Forum on Disability
Equality Commission for NI
Help the Aged Northern Ireland
Leonard Cheshire Foundation
MENCAP
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health
North West Forum of People with Disabilities
PRAXIS
Parents & Professionals & Autism
Rethink
Royal National Institute for the Blind (NI)
Royal Institute for Deaf People (NI)
Sense NI
The Cedar Foundation
The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association
Threshold – Richmond Fellowship NI

APPENDIX 5



LIST OF ORGANISATIONS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE JOINT CONSULTATION EVENTS HOSTED BY NIHE

Action Mental Health
Advice NI
Cedar Foundation
CRC
Disability Action
Equality Commission
Information Commission
MENCAP
NITAP
North Down Community Network
Probation Board NI
PSNI
QUB
Rethink
RNIB
SCA
The Blind Centre
Visual Access NI
Women's Forum NI