

DISABILITY EQUALITY STATEMENT & ACTION PLAN



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WELCOME FROM THE GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Welcome to North Housing Group's first Disability Equality Plan.

Our commitment is strong and we've done lots to promote independence in recent years. However we're far from complacent and Disability duties will help to ensure that equality for disabled people is at the centre of all that we do.

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 requires us to promote disability equality in all our activities. We are fully committed to fulfilling our statutory duties and this plan sets out how we will do this. The Plan covers our approach to disability equality and establishes our future priorities with the action plan.

All Board Members and employees will be made aware of the Plan and their individual and collective responsibilities. We are also committed to ensuring our services and policies are responsive, stretching and inclusive for all disabled people.

At the heart of our Plan is the involvement of disabled people themselves. We cannot improve opportunities for disabled people unless they are involved in decision-making.

Only by working together can we improve our services and achieve the goal of equality of opportunity for all disabled people.



Angela Lockwood
**Acting Group Chief
Executive**

INTRODUCTION

The Disability Equality Plan is a strategy setting out the North Star Housing Group's approach to promoting disability equality. The Plan sets out how we intend to meet our legislative obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

The Act placed a general duty on all public authorities to promote disability equality. A number of specific duties have also been introduced to help public bodies meet the general duty.

This is our first Disability Equality Plan and a progress report will be published annually. During its final year we will carry out a comprehensive review to assess how well we have complied with the General Duty to promote disability equality. We will look again at the way we run our services and how we tackle disability equality by working closely with local disabled people (and their carers / support where applicable).

Our annual review in year one will allow us to update the Plan to reflect new areas of work and issues raised from further discussions with disability groups and services.

We are committed to providing the best possible services for everyone in the areas we operate within. This plan outlines our approach to ensure that the needs of disabled people are anticipated and met as part of our approach to excellent customer service.

This document linked to the Equality & Diversity Action Plan & Statement sets out our overall vision for disability equality together with the objectives and priorities that will help us turn our vision into reality. It describes the key actions we will take and the close partnership working we will develop to improve outcomes for disabled people we can have an impact on.

OUR CONTEXT

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 amends the previous Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The new Act places a duty on all public bodies to promote disability equality. This is generally referred to as the Disability Equality Duty.

The Disability Equality Duty requires public bodies to adopt a proactive approach, mainstreaming disability equality into all decisions and activities. This is similar to the duty to promote race equality under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

The Disability Equality Duty comprises a set of general and specific duties that the Group must comply with.

The Disability Equality Duty

➤ The General Duty

The duty requires all public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the DDA
- eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- encourage participation by disabled persons in public life; and
- take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons.

➤ **Specific Duties**

These duties set out a framework to assist authorities in planning, delivering and evaluating action to meet the general duty and to report on these activities. Central to this framework is the Disability Equality Scheme which is there to demonstrate how each public body will meet its duties in relation to the DDA and is required to set out:

- A statement of how disabled people have been involved in developing the scheme
- The Action Plan
- The arrangements for gathering information about performance
- The arrangements for assessing the information about performance
- How the scheme will be reviewed.

The Social Model of Disability

North Star Housing Group believes the Social Model of Disability demonstrates that inequality of disability is a result of social structures and attitudes. The Group aims to embed disability equality in all we do to achieve overall service and organisational improvements.

The social model primarily sees a disability as the result of limitations imposed upon the individual by social and physical barriers, which prevent full involvement in the life of the individual's society. It believes that society is organised to suit the needs of the fittest and that this is unfair. It is not the duty of disabled people to adapt and conform (normalisation), but society's responsibility to adapt to meet their needs. Disability is not seen as something invoking pity or in need of a cure. Equality for disabled people is seen in the same light as equality for other under-represented groups.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 2005

The DDA covers disabled people and people who have had a disability in the past. Disability is defined as:

“A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”.

The key words within the definition are:-

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|-----------------------|--|
| Impairment | The definition covers physical and mental impairments, including sight and hearing (sensory), learning disabilities and mental illness (if recognised by a respected body of medical opinion). |
| Substantial | The guidelines are vague and simply state “for an effect to be substantial, it must be more than minor”. |
| Long-term | These are effects that have:- <ul style="list-style-type: none">- lasted at least 12 months; OR- are likely to last at least 12 months; OR- are likely to last for the rest of the life of the person affected. Long-term effects include those which are likely to recur. |
| Day-to-day activities | Day-to-day activities are normal activities carried out by most people on a regular basis, and must involve one of the following broad categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- mobility (moving from place to place)- manual dexterity |

- physical co-ordination
- continence
- the ability to lift, carry or move ordinary objects
- speech, hearing or eyesight
- memory, or ability to concentrate, learn or understand, being able to recognise physical danger.

Conditions Exempt From The DDA 1995

The following conditions are exempt from the definition:-

- Addictions - inc. drugs and alcohol;
- Personality and other disorders - inc. kleptomania, pyromania, paedophilia, and personality disorders including psychopathic disorders;
- Deliberately acquired disfigurements - e.g. piercing or tattoos;
- Hay fever and similar conditions.

In terms of the second point above, to achieve this, it is proposed that the Regulations should exclude “disorders of child or adult personality, sexuality or behaviour” from being regarded as impairments.

ELIMINATING UNLAWFUL DISCRIMINATION

Direct Disability Discrimination

This occurs when a person is treated less favourably, for reason of their disability, than others would be treated in similar circumstances. Abuse and harassment are forms of direct discrimination.

A disabled person should also not be expected to do the same activity as their colleagues without first taking into account their disability. Where the activity has a negative impact they have the right to refrain from participating. A disabled person should not feel pushed into such activities they do not wish to take part in.

We will not discriminate against a disabled person for reason of their disability. We will take all reasonable steps to ensure the Group, or its staff, does not treat disabled people in a less favourable manner, unjustifiably, for a reason related to their disability.

Indirect Disability Discrimination

This occurs when an unjustifiable requirement or condition is applied to an activity, job, environment, or where a practice disadvantages or excludes a disabled person.

ELIMINATING DISABILITY RELATED HARASSMENT

What does this mean?

The term ‘harassment’ in the context of the disability equality duty refers not only to forms of harassment specifically prohibited by the DDA and the Harassment Act but also other forms of unwanted activity even where this is not unlawful. It can take many forms from direct verbal abuse to comments which make an individual feel uncomfortable, intimidated or degraded

Harassment

Harassment is a very broad concept. It includes harassment specifically prohibited by the Disability Discrimination Act. It also includes harassment which is made unlawful by the 1997 Protection from Harassment Act. However, it is not just limited to harassment that is unlawful. It can take many forms, from direct verbal abuse to comments that make an individual feel uncomfortable, intimidated or degraded.

Victimisation

This occurs where a person is treated unfairly or less favourably than other persons would be treated because she or he has asserted a right.

Disciplinary Procedures

Everyone has the right to be treated with consideration, dignity and respect, and to work in an environment free from bullying and harassment. We are opposed to any form of bullying and harassment and may take disciplinary measures where necessary.

A disabled employee, candidate, contractor, or person on work placement, will have the right to use the grievance and complaints procedures if they feel that this policy has been breached, whether directly or indirectly.

PROMOTING POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS DISABLED PEOPLE

What does this mean?

This part of the duty, as with the other parts, contributes to the overall goal of promoting equality of opportunity. Whilst many people have positive attitudes towards disabled people, some express pity, fear, and lack of respect and/or contempt. Demeaning stereotypes, or simply the absence of any representation in public images, both have very negative impacts on disabled peoples' lives.

Such attitudes are not only hurtful, but can lead to discrimination and place unnecessary restrictions on disabled people.

Eliminating ignorance and prejudice

In order to contribute to the overall goal of eliminating equality of opportunity, we need to consider what we can do to eliminate ignorance and prejudice in the wider community.

UNDERSTANDING OUR CURRENT POSITION

In order to develop the Disability Equality Plan it is important to understand the characteristics of our operating environment and its communities. A needs analysis against each outcome is included in later sections of this document, however some key information to outline the North Star picture is summarised below.

Disability In The Areas We Operate

There are over 9 million disabled people in the UK. Nationally, this equates to about 18% of the population.

In our 2006 Tenant Satisfaction Survey Data for Endeavour Housing Association half of all respondents (51.6%) had someone in their household with a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity. Four fifths of all tenants who had a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity (81.4%) stated that it does limit their activities. 64 households (11.0%) contained a person who used a wheelchair.

Teesdale Housing Association's 2007 survey found that 58% of tenants have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity. 87.9% of tenants with such a condition said that their illness, disability or infirmity limited their activities in some way. 8.4% of households contain at least one member who is a wheelchair user.

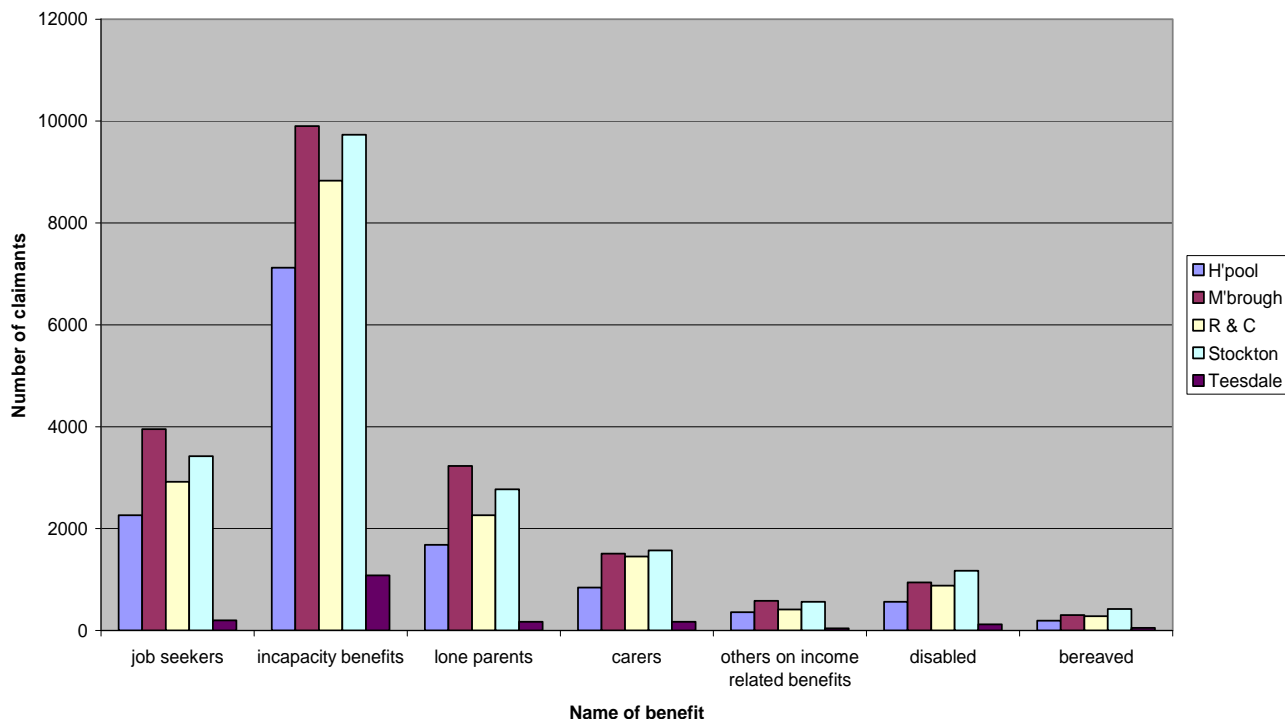
In November 2007 Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland had over a fifth the working-age population claiming a key benefit. Stockton and Teesdale were slightly lower with 16.6% and 12.3% respectively; the highest amount of which were claiming incapacity benefit, with Hartlepool the highest amount and Teesdale the lowest. In each area around 1% was claiming disability living allowance. This benefit is for those who need help with personal care or have walking difficulties because they are physically or mentally disabled whether they work or not.

However, not everyone protected under the Disability Discrimination Act defines them self as disabled. This makes it difficult to estimate actual numbers and types of disabilities prevalent in our operating areas.

North Star as a parent group had 2 (7.7%) members of staff declared themselves and 1 undeclared/unknown, Endeavour HA had one (1.7%) and Teesdale has none.

	Hartlepool		Middlesbrough		Redcar & Cleveland		Stockton		Teesdale	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total claimants	13030	23.5	20410	23.6	17030	20.3	19650	16.6	1830	12.3
Job seekers	2260	4.1	3950	4.6	2920	3.5	3420	2.9	200	1.4
Incapacity benefits	7120	12.9	9900	11.5	8830	10.5	9730	8.2	1080	7.3
Lone parents	1680	3	3230	3.7	2260	2.7	2770	2.3	170	1.1
Carers	840	1.5	1510	1.8	1450	1.7	1570	1.3	170	1.1
Others on income related benefits	360	0.7	580	0.7	410	0.5	560	0.5	40	0.3
Disabled	560	1	940	1.1	880	1.1	1170	1	120	0.8
Bereaved	190	0.4	300	0.3	280	0.3	420	0.4	50	0.4

Working-age client group - key benefits claimants (May 2007)



The Disability distribution of North Star Housing Group Staff

	Endeavour HA	North Star HG	Teesdale HA
Yes	1	2	0
No	58	23	20
Not known/declared	0	1	0

KEY AREAS FOR NORTH STAR HOUSING GROUP

Where are we now

We are passionate about making sure that no one is disadvantaged by their personal circumstances or where they live. We want the areas we operate within to be places where everyone feels accepted and valued as part of our communities and where everyone who lives, works or visits can realise their full potential and be the best that they can be.

➤ Involvement of Residents

Our Resident Involvement Strategy is designed to ensure that all our tenants and service users are positively encouraged and have equal opportunity to be involved in the governance and management of the Association. As part of this strategy, we aim to remove any potential barriers that could exclude certain groups from becoming involved.

Endeavour's 4U Group and the Tenants' Advisory Panel have disabled members and have been influential in raising the understanding of and solutions to the concerns facing disabled people.

➤ **Employment**

As part of our commitment to equality and diversity the Group aims to ensure that staff at all levels and across business areas reflect the communities and diverse groups we operate in.

As a double tick Disability Symbol User, we guarantee to interview all suitably qualified candidates who consider themselves to have a disability and who meet the essential criteria.

Employers who use the symbol have agreed with Jobcentre Plus that they will take action on these five commitments to:

- interview all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and consider them on their abilities
- ensure there is a mechanism in place to discuss, at any time, but at least once a year, with disabled employees what can be done to make sure they can develop and use their abilities
- make every effort when employees become disabled to make sure they stay in employment
- take action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness needed to make these commitments work
- each year to review the five commitments and what has been achieved, plan ways to improve on them and let employees and Jobcentre Plus know about progress and future plans.

The Group also recognises the importance of having an effective work-life balance in order to maintain staff morale and productivity. The provision of any kind of leave is necessary to achieve this. The Group has implemented the following policies to ensure the fair and consistent management of leave.

- HR8 Annual Leave
- HR8a Special Leave

➤ **Harassment & Bullying**

North Star is committed to a Harassment & Bullying policy that ensures the fair treatment and dignity at work of all its employees. Bullying and harassment of any kind will not be tolerated in the workplace. Such behaviour will be treated as a disciplinary offence and in certain circumstances it may be unlawful. It is expected that all employees comply with this policy and treat colleagues with dignity and respect.

We will support staff fully in dealing with discrimination or harassment of any kind. Our commitment to staff is to provide a positive working environment for all.

➤ **Customer profile – Mapping Communities**

We recently collected data from a 'Getting to know you Questionnaire' which has gathered information about our tenants and the members of their household. The aim of this questionnaire is to ensure continuous improvement of our services and that they serve the needs of our customers.

The information from these questionnaires and our resident information sheets ensures that our services are delivered in a fair and equal way.

➤ Procurement

We enter into large numbers of contracts with private and voluntary organisations for goods, works, services and staff. We need to ensure that in procuring services we comply with all aspects of the Equality Act 2006, including the general duty for Disability.

We will consider whether the way in which services are procured promotes equality of opportunity. We will ensure that when contracting out services, disability equality is built into contracts and that the contractor fulfils its disability equality contractual requirements.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Equality impact assessments will be used as the main tool for assessing whether the Group meets its disability equality duties and the relevant legislation. We will continually assess whether our procedures and strategies meet the current needs of our staff and customers. These assessments will provide the basis for action to improve our policies where appropriate.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY AT NORTH STAR HOUSING GROUP

The Disability Equality Action Plan is designed to support North Star Housing Group's Commitment to Equality and Diversity Statement and will be in keeping with the "Fairness & Freedom Report".

GATHERING & USING INFORMATION

The gathering of information from various sources is essential to ensure the success of the Disability Equality Action Plan. This will be done through the demographic profiling of our staff, service users and the wider communities which we operate in. We will also annually review our Equality and Diversity statistical information and benchmark this across the sector. Each business area across the group will collect their own data.

North Star is committed to maintaining high standards of confidentiality in all aspects of its work and uses any private information in a sensitive manner. The information gathered regarding equality and diversity will only be used for benchmarking purposes and assessing our performance in achieving objectives set out in the action plans.

MONITORING & REVIEWING

The Disability Equality Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed by the Board and Group Senior Management Team.

Roles & Priorities

Board Members	Will monitor our success, set targets and performance indicators that will measure our achievement of success against needs analysis, objectives and action plans.
Group Chief Executive	Will champion Equality & Diversity
Group Senior Management Team	Will ensure the mainstream implementation of the action plan through effective leadership
Head of HR & Corporative Services	Will co-ordinate implementation of the Plans and report to the Board, GSMT and Equality and Diversity Group on progress
Heads of Service and Managers	Will oversee implementation, compliance and monitoring of the plan in their business area
All Staff	Will adhere to the Equality and Diversity values

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Equality and Diversity Commitment Statement
- Equality and Diversity Strategic Objectives
- Gender Equality Statement and Action Plan 2008
- Cultural Diversity Equality Statement and Action Plan 2008

Statement & Action Plans to be Formally Reviewed September 2009

Disability Equality Action Plan

Actions	Target Date	Responsibility	Resources required	Outcomes
Establish Disabled Staff Network Investigate requirement for a disabled staff network. Launch network with Terms of Reference to work on Employment Best Practice and Impact Assessment	December 2008	HR	Within Existing Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Making our services more inclusive for disabled people. ➤ Developing new & existing services for Disabled People. ➤ Making sure we involve disabled people and that our outcomes meet their needs. ➤ Making sure that the impact of our outcomes are assessed to ensure that they do not present a negative effect or discriminate against disability equality.
Establish Networks with Local Disability services / organisations Links Established with RNIB and Shaw Trust. Work Placements agreed.	April 2008 Ongoing	HR	Within Existing Resources	
Determine Workforce Profile in terms of disabled persons. Verify staff personal details. (Staff information verification exercise)	April 2008	HR	Within Existing Resources	
Ensure that recruitment / training & development opportunities, internal & external to the organisation are accessible to all	On-going	HR	Within Existing Resources	
To establish the needs of disabled staff and develop further understanding of issues facing disabled people	Ongoing	HR	Within Existing Resources	
To undertake impact assessment on all policies, procedures and employment activities	To commence Dec 2008	HR & ED Group	Training Costs	

Actions	Target Date	Responsibility	Resources required	Outcomes
To develop a Customer Charter for Disability (Included in the Charter for wider E&D Groupings)	December 2008	Service Coordinators Tenant Liaison Officer	Within existing	Involve Service Users in the development of relevant and measurable targets
To collect profiling information for all tenants	December 2008	Resident Liaison Officer	Within Existing Resources	Increase the supply of accessible housing, maximising choice
Identify and address any barriers to resident involvement on the grounds of Disability.	December 2008	Resident Liaison Officer		Deliver services and improvements that meets the needs of service users
To develop a communication plan to ensure that tenants and residents contribute to our Disability Action Plan and Service Development / Improvement.	To commence Jan 2008	Service Coordinators		Identify if current services meet needs and where services need to be adjusted
Ensure all new buildings consider the needs of people who have a disability	Ongoing	Supported Housing/ Development	Within existing	Completed June 2008. services

<p>Ensure that the development of service improvements and policies reflect the needs of service users</p>	<p>Continuous involvement of staff and Tenants</p>	<p>Operations Coordinators</p>	<p>Within existing Resources</p>	<p>still meet need and are sustainable. Review 2010 First Step is subject to separate work</p> <p>Develop an approach which maximises opportunities for involvement</p> <p>Formalises our approach. Will develop our relationships and involvement with an existing specialist group entirely made up of Tenants with a Disability. This maximises the opportunities for involvement</p> <p>Offers more opportunities for formal involvement</p> <p>Assist in identifying accessibility issues</p> <p>Target of 70% successful move on set for 08/09. helps us to analyse the direct impact our services have on users ability to move onto more independent living</p>
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Actions	Target Date	Responsibility	Resources required	Outcomes
Review shared houses and establish current relevance. Establish service users and commissioners views	July 2008	Head of Supported Housing/ Head of Property Services		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Making our services more inclusive for disabled people. ➤ Developing new & existing services for Disabled People. ➤ Making sure we involve disabled people and that our outcomes meet their needs. ➤ Making sure that the impact of our outcomes are assessed to ensure that they do not present a negative effect or discriminate against disability equality.
Following the recent Tenant profiling work, further develop a base line assessment of tenants and Service users who have a disability	Sept 2008	Heads of Service		
<p>Review how we consult our Service users</p> <p>Develop robust relationships and formal links with Endeavours 4U Group and tenants Advisory Panel</p> <p>Publicise the 4U Group and support disabled Tenants/ Service Users to join</p>	<p>Sept 2008</p> <p>August 2008</p> <p>August 2008</p>	<p>Head of Supported Housing / Operations co-ordinator</p> <p>Head of Supported Housing / Operations co-ordinator</p> <p>Head of Supported Housing / Operations co-ordinator</p>		

Actions	Target Date	Responsibility	Resources required	Outcomes
<p>Prioritise health and safety repairs for people disabled and recently disabled tenants and ensure that the maintenance budget covers these repairs and has an adaptations allocation.</p>	<p>On-going</p>	<p>Head of Property Services</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Making our services more inclusive for disabled people.
<p>Monitor and evaluate access to service from people who have a disability</p>	<p>March 09</p>	<p>Annual evaluation Operations Co-ordinator</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Developing new & existing services for Disabled People.
<p>Monitor outcomes for people moving on from supported housing</p>	<p>August 08 then annually</p>	<p>Annual evaluation Operations Co-ordinator</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Making sure we involve disabled people and that our outcomes meet their needs.
<p>Analyse the take up and Satisfaction of the repairs service According to Disability</p>	<p>April 2009</p>	<p>Head of Property Services</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Making sure that the impact of our outcomes are assessed to ensure that they do not present a negative effect or discriminate against disability equality.
<p>Better understanding of the experience of the repairs service according to gender</p>	<p>April 2009</p>	<p>Head of Property Services</p>		