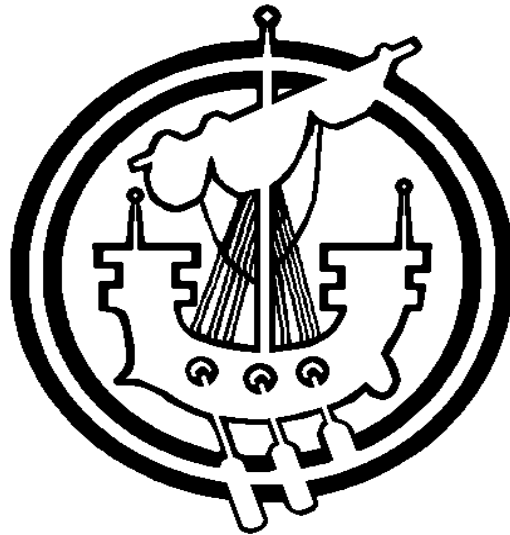


# **Comhairle nan Eilean Siar**

## **Disability Equality Scheme Annual Report 2009**



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## **Introduction**

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has a duty to publish an annual progress report for each year of the Disability Equality Scheme. This Disability Equality Scheme is written to ensure that the Comhairle complies with its duties under the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005. A Disability Equality Scheme must set out the arrangements put in place to fulfill the duty to promote disability equality, which must have due regard to the need to:

- Promote equality of opportunity;
- Eliminate unlawful disability discrimination;
- Eliminate disability related harassment;
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people;
- Encourage participation of disabled people in public life;
- Take steps to meet the needs of disabled people even where that involves treating disabled person more favourably than other persons.

Like most public authorities, the Comhairle must also meet specific duties which set out a framework to comply with the general duty and must:

- Publish a Disability Equality Scheme Annual Report by 4<sup>th</sup> December 2007;
- Involve disabled people in producing the Scheme and Action Plan;
- Demonstrate actions in the Scheme and appropriate outcomes;
- Report on progress, review and revise the Scheme.

## **Background**

The Comhairle is an island council serving a population an estimated population of 26,200 as at June 2008 (Figures from General Register Office for Scotland).

The Western Isles are made up of 29 islands, 13 of which are inhabited. The demographics of the area are changing as the population is ageing, and the likelihood of having a disability rises with age. Given that, it is likely that the total number of disabled will increase in the future, so too will the challenge to ensure that the Comhairle is meeting the needs of all its disabled population. The last census in 2001 showed that over 17% of the population were permanently sick/disabled and over 20% had a limiting long term illness. Significantly since then the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 has also widened the definition to also include conditions which were not previously covered in previous legislation. The Comhairle must now ensure that it must now take into account the needs of all these people when carrying out its functions.

## **Progress to Date**

Further to the multi-agency Diversity and Equality Steering Group (DESG) events which were held in 2007 and 2008 and the establishment of a Disability Equality Working Group (DEWG) which feeds into DESG, the Comhairle have been able to engage with and involve disabled people and their representatives in ongoing development and progress of the Action Plan.

With regular engagement the DEWG Group (with valuable membership from disabled people, carers and Access Panels) are able to raise specific points on

how to improve locally the lives of all disabled persons in the area. Key action points which were raised include the need for better access and accessible transport; the need for better communications and accessible information on Council services and support. The Working Group, which meets bi-monthly, has created an established forum of people with disabilities to contribute to the Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan.

The Comhairle have been able to maintain contact and keep communication open with disabled people and their representatives through DESG and DEWG meetings and individuals are aware of who to contact within the Comhairle. Through DESG and DEWG disabled people and those with an interest in disability issues are getting more involved in the democratic process by attending or making representations to Committee meetings, particularly with Planning related matters where their expertise can be used at an early stage to provide solutions and address potential areas of concern. The Comhairle web-pages are up to date with contact details and there is also a dedicated Equalities email address for the public to use to access information or seek advice.

## **Employment**

The 2008/09 employee monitoring information evidenced that only 23 employees of the Comhairle consider themselves to have a disability, this represents 1% of the workforce. The Comhairle recognise that the reality is likely to be different. Where employees do have a condition which falls within the Disability Discrimination Act definition of a disabled person but the individual manages and controls the condition they may choose not to disclose their disability or do not consider themselves to have a disability.

## **Access**

Access remains a high priority area for the participants at the Steering and Working Groups. Where significant improvements were made throughout 2008 to public buildings, work has continued throughout 2009. The Comhairle recognise that access to building and services continues to be one the biggest barriers to disabled people participating in daily activities.

The following works were also completed in 2009:

### **Small Capital Projects -**

Nicolson Institute- Replacement of various internal doors with new fire doors

CnES Training Annexe – Replacement of external doors

Ardseileach Hostel – New fire doors installed

Aird School – Construction of new calming room

Bragar School – Upgrading of lighting within the school

Uig School – Replacement of 4 external doors

Laxdale School – Replacement of primary toilet cubicles \* work ongoing to be completed early 2010.

### **Large Capital Projects –**

Eoligary School – Upgrading of toilets

Nicolson Institute (Canteen Portacabin) – New facility which is fully compliant with Regulations

Nicolson Institute (All Buildings) – New access ramps and external doors

Garrygall Depot – Fully refurbished which is fully compliant with Regulations

lochdar Care Unit – Removal of existing bath & replaced with level access shower

Castlebay Fitness Suite – Fully refurbished – fully compliant with Regulations

2010 will see a large number of projects being undertaken by the Comhairle with the commencement of the Western Isles Schools Project with building expected to start in June 2010. The Stornoway Town Hall will be undergoing restoration and improved access works including the provision of a disabled lift to enable users to move from the ground floor to the first floor. Construction of Harris House (care home) will commence in 2010. All of these major projects have involved public consultation and the plans are accessible on the online planning portal on the Comhairle website and by visiting the Development department. The Planning Portal has enabled interested parties, particularly Access Panels to view the plans at an early stage and make representation to the Environment and Protective Services Committee when the plans are being considered. Again, this also disabled people and their representatives to become more involved in the democratic process.

## **Disabled Parking**

Whilst number and location of disabled parking bays has improved since working with the Access Panels, availability of the bays continues to cause problems for disabled users. It is hoped that with the introduction of the **Disabled Persons Parking Places (Scotland) Act 2009** the situation will improve. The Comhairle will work with the local police and traffic wardens to enforce the disabled spaces, particularly in the town centre. The bays that exist in rural areas in places like

church car parks and at shops or supermarkets present logistical and financial issues. SCOTS (Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland) have written the Scottish Government with regard to funding the requirements of the act and the Comhairle await their response.

A disabled parking bay is still required to be marked in the Tarbert car park, the Harris Access Panel have advised of the preference for the location of this bay and it is expected to be marked when the contractors are next on the island to carry out works.

## **Equality Impact Assessments**

In 2009 the Comhairle has made progress with regard to the completion of Equality Impact Assessments (EIA). The EIA toolkits have been simplified for ease of use and agreed by the Corporate Management Team. The EIA toolkits have been published on the Comhairle website along with guidance on how an EIA should be conducted for employees to follow as appropriate. The Corporate Management Team agreed that all new policies, services and strategies be equality impact assessed prior to being submitted to the Comhairle for approval. The approach has been implemented for the December 2009 series of Committee meetings and will be administered with the assistance of the Democratic Services Manager. All existing policies, services and strategies will be Equality Impact Assessed as they are due for renewal therefore there will be a cyclical approach to the completion of EIA's where eventually all existing policies will have a completed EIA.

Equality Impact Assessment training has continued throughout 2009. Training is available for all employee's to attend and those responsible for the writing of

policies are particularly encouraged to attend. Comhairle Councilors also attended Equality Impact Assessment training in November 2009, this will assist them in the decision making process when considering new and amended policies at Committee meetings.

Training has been carried out and further training will continue through 2009, focusing on officers responsible for policy planning. The Comhairle has an EIA toolkit and checklist that is ready to be rolled out for all new policies and to also focus on existing policies with a high relevance; eventually all existing policies will be put through an EIA.

It is the aim of the Comhairle is to carry out EIA's at an early stage of the policy development process.

## **Training**

All new employees receive Equality and Diversity training as part of the new induction programme. Equality and Diversity training is not mandatory for existing employees although it is encouraged for all customer facing employees and with the implementation of the new organisational Performance Appraisal system it is envisaged that there will be more training referrals where needs are identified and these will be incorporated into training plans.

## **The Education Authority**

The Education Authority has made progress on the plans to build on the existing Access Strategy and Additional Support Needs database. All children with a disability have an Individual Action Plan which is reviewed regularly. Visits are

made by Quality Improvement Officers all ensure inclusion, attainment and achievements are monitored and met.

The schools in the Education Authority area are compliant with the Access and Inclusion Strategy. Inclusion employees make regular visits to monitor compliance.

## **Licensing Board**

The Licensing Board is linked in with the progress of the Comhairle. The impact assessment process is therefore at the same stage of that of the Comhairle. The Licensing Board has established a forum which involves members from different parts of the community e.g. the Chief Constable, holders of premises and personal licenses, young people, people resident in the area, people from functions relating to health, education or social work. The forum advertised in local media seeking nominations to the forum. This has allowed more community involvement in the policies and direction the Licensing Board.

## **Website**

The updating of the Comhairle website has been completed in accordance with WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) set out by the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium). These guidelines aim at ensuring websites are accessible by all users including those with disabilities. All of the Comhairle web content complies with or is in the process of being made compliant with the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) 'AA' standard. Non-W3C formats (e.g.,Flash, PDF) or multimedia will only be used where they are the most

appropriate format for the content in question. The equalities and diversity section of the website has been updated. The aim is to include more information on equalities and diversity and to include links to support agencies and local information regarding diversity. The website also contains the 'Browsealoud' feature for people who find it difficult to read online.

## **Reviewing the Scheme**

In 2010 the Comhairle will in publishing a new Single Equality Scheme following the introduction of the new Equality Bill which is expected to be passed by Parliament early in 2010. As such a new Disability Equality Scheme has not been published however the current action plan will continue to be reviewed and updated until such time that the new Scheme has been published.

## **More Information**

If you have any comments or questions about the scheme, or to request information in an alternative format, please contact:

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