



Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service



Disability Equality Scheme 2006 - 2009

This document will be made available on request in a range of formats and languages

Arabic

قدع تاغل و قفل تخم بيل اس أب بل طلا دن ع ققي ثولا هذه ريفوت متيس

Bengali

অনুরোধক্রমে এই ডকুমেন্ট বোঝার ও পড়ার যোগ্য বিভিন্ন নমুনায় এবং ভাষায় দেওয়া যাবে।

Cantonese (simplified)

这份资料有多种格式及多种外文译本，可供索取。

Cantonese (traditional)

這份資料有多種格式及多種外文譯本，可供索取。

Czech

Tento dokument bude na požádání k dispozici v řadě formátů a jazyků.

Farsi

رد فل تخم یا هن ابز و لاکش اب امش تس او خرد اب انب ار کردم نی امین اوت یم
می هد رارق ن اترای تخا

French

Vous pouvez obtenir le présent document sous différentes formes et dans différentes langues sur demande.

Gujarati

વનિંતી કરશો તો આ દસ્તાવેજ વવિધિ રીતો અને ભાષાઓમાં ઉપલબ્ધ કરવામાં આવશે.

Hindi

बनिती करने से यह दस्तावेज़ अलग रतियों और भाषा में उपलब्ध कीया जायेगा।

Polish

Niniejszy dokument udostępniamy na życzenie w różnych formatach i językach.

Punjabi

ਮੰਗ ਕਰਨ ਤੇ ਇਹ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਕਈ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਦਾਨ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ।

Tigrinya

እዚ ጽሑፍ እዚ ብተፈላለዩ መልክታን ቋንቋን ክገበር ይከኣል እዩ።

Ukranian

Цей документ буде надаватися на запит у різних форматах та різними мовами.

Urdu

یہ سول کش روا سون ابز یی یک زی و اتسد می رپ ے نرک تس او خرد
یگ ے ایج یی انب بای تسد

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Foreword - Statement of Intent

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service serves a widely diverse population. A population, within, which there are many people living with medical or mental conditions and which through society's prejudice and inability to understand, creates a disabling environment. Internally we have worked hard within the last decade to represent that diverse community in our staff profile. For reasons, which we shall cover shortly, people living with disabilities do not feature conspicuously on our operational fire stations.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 brought a number of responsibilities to public organisations such as ours, in particular, to eliminate unlawful discrimination in employment, improve access to goods and services and access to our buildings. GFRS has always taken those duties as being the right things to do morally and we will continue to take that stance. However, through this Disability Equality Scheme we have embraced the additional duties placed upon us to examine "what" we do as a service provider and ensure that none of our functions e.g. our operational response, our community fire safety work, our training activities, policies or procedures, adversely affect any particular disability group.

We are committed to providing a service to our communities, which is of the highest standard and provided regardless of the community groups we are pleased to be there for. That same commitment extends to employment opportunities and we will continue to seek ways in which we can extend our current diverse staff profile.

We take our duties with the Act and this Scheme extremely seriously and commit to making progress on the Action Plan, which has been created as a result of our assessment of our Functions, Policies and Procedures, which are detailed within this Disability Equality Scheme.

We wish to portray the high level of commitment to this Scheme not only by the Elected Members and Principal Management of the Fire and Rescue Service but also acknowledge the support to the Fire and Rescue Authority by the signatories of the three principal Trade Unions.



Terry Standing
Chief Fire Officer



Cllr Shaun Parson
Cabinet Member
Community Safety, Planning and the Economy



Leroy Phillpotts
Fire Brigade' Union



Shirley Jones
Unison



Bruce Stephens
TGWU

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Section One - Introduction

What do we mean by “disability”?

The Disability Discrimination Act defines disability as “a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a persons ability to carry out normal day to day activities”

The effect must be “substantial”, (more than minor or trivial) adverse and long term (that is it has lasted or is likely to last for at least a year).

This definition has been in use since 1995, however, changes in legislation in 2005 broadened the definition and now brings legal protection to people who are diagnosed with HIV, Multiple Sclerosis and Cancer. Previously any person with these conditions was only protected from discrimination once the condition had begun to have an effect on their daily lives. People with mental illnesses are also afforded protection.

The (medical) definition above provides the legal framework as far as discrimination is concerned, however, what is more important here is that many people who live with what appear to be disabling conditions will say that it is not the physical or mental condition which has a disabling effect, rather it is the attitudes

of individuals or organisations towards the person or their condition which is “disabling”.

We believe this “social” definition is more appropriate and that, by taking this view we can focus on changing any cultural or organisational attitudes, which will, in future, place the individual at the heart of our considerations whether those considerations are with regard to employment or access to our range of services. It is this regard, which has shaped our Action Plan, which can be found in Section 3 of this Scheme.

Disability In Gloucestershire:

Across the UK there are around 10 million people who have a disability and, therefore, have rights under the Disability Discrimination Act. This roughly equates to 1 in 5 of the population. Within Gloucestershire the number of people with a disability closely matches those nationwide figures. Some 92,000 people in the County identify themselves as having a disability.

The following table gives the breakdown of those numbers shown by District Council area and age groups.

Age Group	County	Cheltenham	Cotswold	Forest	Gloucester	Stroud	Tewkesbury
0-15	10,225	1,874	1,171	1,509	2,434	1,835	1,440
16-64	34,810	6,518	4,193	5,744	7,693	6,251	4,648
65-74	14,517	2,465	2,004	2,554	2,791	2,675	2,008
75 plus	32,445	6,229	4,886	4,610	5,765	6,268	4,622
Total	91,997	17,086	12,254	14,418	18,683	17,030	12,718

Background to Employment and Disabilities:

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service employs around 600 staff, the majority of those 600 are operational firefighters who work at our 20 community fire stations throughout the County.

In 1995 when the DDA first came into being, the key provision at that time related to employment. However, the thinking at that time was that, to do the job of an operational firefighter you had to be fully fit and healthy in body and mind. This also applied to the Police and the Armed Forces and we were actually exempted from the Employment provisions of the Act at that time.

Therefore, at that time, simply indicating on an application form that you had a disability would most likely result in you not being considered any further as far as that application was concerned. Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service did not always take that negative stance but at the same time, some of our recruitment processes did not always provide the most appropriate environment or standards through which a disabled applicant would receive empathetic and fair treatment. Eyesight standards have always been very high within the UK Fire Service, many suggesting, unreasonably so. At the age of 40, firefighters are subjected to a fairly rigorous medical examination which is then repeated every three years until they retire. At this stage the eyesight of many firefighters had started to deteriorate. This was not necessarily to a dangerous level of safety but nonetheless often such firefighters were medically retired. This led to a waste of experience, talent and commitment and was also expensive in terms of pension payments and the cost of recruiting replacement staff.

Fortunately, now in such circumstances firefighters are provided with prescription standard safety spectacles, which can be worn at work so keeping such staff in employment. This could be seen as the first example of a reasonable adjustment as far as the Service was concerned.

However, from 1995 onwards although most firefighters appeared to be fully fit and healthy a number throughout the UK were developing conditions such as diabetes for which the medical opinion would mean again, medical retirement.

A number of individuals either challenged these medical opinions or researched their own circumstances in order to present a good case to their fire authorities so that they could, with some reasonable adjustments, remain in active, operational service.

These cases over the decade resulted in the exemption under the Employment Regulations of the DDA being removed in 2004. This has now brought a fresh impetus to the fire and rescue service in two ways:

1. For existing firefighters who develop a condition or suffer an injury, which meets the "disabled" criteria, the fire and rescue service works with them and the medical profession in order to find ways to enable them to remain as operational firefighters, often again through the use of reasonable adjustments
2. For applicants to the Service, again on a case-by-case basis we seek to establish what reasonable adjustments we can provide so that an applicant is not disadvantaged by their condition and can compete fairly with other applicants.

We hope the benefits of these approaches are such that existing staff appreciate how much the Service values them and this will encourage honesty from individuals as far as informing the Service is concerned, so that we can make any reasonable adjustments that may be required.

In addition, we hope it changes the perspective of the public, some of whom may be contemplating applying to become a firefighter but feel their disability would prevent it. It also shows that we appreciate and look at the abilities of people and not their disabilities.

Obviously, there will be some medical conditions, which would not be conducive to an organisation, which works in hazardous and risky environments but these will be decided upon through the recruitment process where risk assessment is a key part of the testing criteria.

Current Approaches:

The removal of the Employment exemptions we referred to earlier have brought new challenges to us especially in relation to existing staff. The challenges relate to managers and the medical advisers treating any case, which arises in a sympathetic manner and maintaining a focus on the individual.

A further associated challenge is to create trust and confidence by our staff so that they will inform us if they develop a disabling condition rather than try to hide it.

Section Two - Complying with the Duty

The Disability Equality Duty (DED):

The Duty goes beyond the intention of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (and its amendments). The general intent then was to try to prevent discrimination taking place. However, the new Duty extends that into a more inclusive approach. The DED is intended to:-

- Promote equal opportunities for disabled people
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Eliminate harassment of disabled people
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encourage participation of disabled people in public life
- Take steps to take account of a person's disabilities even when that involves treating disabled people more favourably (this last point breaks new ground in equality legislation and best practice and we provide an example of this further on)

Development of the Disability Equality Scheme:

Through the disability legislation itself and the wealth of information available regarding the needs of people with disabilities it would be tempting to rely upon such information when we first set out to develop this Scheme.

However, we were mindful not to take that, perhaps easier approach and we, therefore, set out a strategy which involved meeting a wide range of people who had varying disabilities to find out what they wanted from their Fire and Rescue Service.

As part of the Community Safety Directorate of the wider County Council we also work closely with the Fairness and Diversity Forum of the County Council and through that group we have been able to shape the content of this Scheme and elements of our Action Plan.

We approached our various consultation events with a "blank canvas" making no assumptions about the particular people or groups we were meeting. The fire and rescue service is changing, in particular, we are placing more emphasis on protecting the public through prevention and education and it was this aspect of change which many people found to be a new and welcoming approach and one they wanted to know more about.

Through these consultation events, however, we found that we were perhaps not providing the range of fire safety advice in formats which suit everyone and these needs are part of our Action Plan.

We have consulted with individuals from the following groups and they have assisted us in developing this Scheme:-

- Gloucestershire Service Users Forum
- Mencap
- Gloucestershire Lifestyles
- Gloucestershire Deaf Association
- Modern Eyes
- Disability Equality Forum
- Speak Out
- Birches Adult Opportunities Centre, Tewkesbury
- Prestbury Day Care Centre
- Cheltenham Hard of Hearing Group
- Wheatridge Court

To those involved in those first consultations we say a heartfelt "thank you". Your contributions have been not only "noted" but also included in our Action Plan.

We will return to you throughout the coming months and years to check if our plans are actually meeting your needs and expectations.

Impact of what we do:

Within the Fire and Rescue Service we have developed ways of assessing what impact our policies and procedures may have on employees and the service users in the communities. This impact assessment process initially considered “race” as an issue, however, we have widened the scope of our assessments to include “disabilities” as well as gender, religion or belief, sexuality and age.

This ensures that we consider potential impact, particularly if it could be of an adverse nature, early on in our planning processes, this way we can prevent damage through discrimination occurring at the outset. If we feel that we are not certain about any potential impact or we feel that adverse impact may occur we will return to those groups we have already consulted in the creation of this Scheme and find out what they think.

Monitoring arrangements:

With regard to the equality impact assessments mentioned above any assessments, which involve consultation, will be posted on the Equalities page of our website for public access (www.glosfire.gov.uk)

Whilst we are accountable to the local political governance of the County Council we are also answerable to Central Government through the Department of Communities and Local Government with our performance, on a wide range of topics, being monitored by the Audit Commission. We provide annual statistics to those departments and those statistics include information relating to the employment of people who have disabilities.

We will be establishing what percentage of our staff confirm they classify themselves as having a disability. We will then, using the information found earlier in this Scheme regarding people in the communities, set

targets for ourselves to encourage greater participation in seeking employment with us, be it as firefighters or one of the range of support roles within GFRS.

We will create positive action initiatives to assist in this. Positive action being a lawful method of encouraging individuals, who are currently under-represented in our organisation, to consider applying to join us. It does not guarantee anyone a job, nor does it mean we reduce our legitimate job standards but it can assist individuals who may, due to their disability, have thought that could be a barrier to employment within the Fire and Rescue Service.

Positive Discrimination

Under normal circumstances with equality legislation and best practice this step would be unlawful. It relates to treating people or individuals from one particular group differently than others in similar or same circumstances.

However, within disability legislation there are a small number of examples where such an approach can take place.

A good example of this is redeployment of a person who has become unable to continue serving in the role they have been carrying out. If a vacancy occurs within another part of the organisation and for which that individual would be a suitable candidate then the vacancy does not need to be advertised for open competition and the individual could simply be offered the redeployment position. Requiring the individual to compete with others, not in a redeployment situation, would be construed as discriminatory. (Case Law exists)

Section Three - Action Plan

Action Plan:

This is the heart of this Disability Equality Scheme, without it the Scheme means very little. We have set targets for ourselves over the next three years, targets we mean to achieve. There will be some cross-fertilisation from the County Council's Scheme in some areas, however, most of our actions will be Fire and Rescue Service specific.

The author of the Plan, the Cultural Change Manager, will provide monthly reports to the Management Team on the introduction and progress of the Plan as part of the Service Business Planning process. He can be contacted on peter.thorp@glosfire.gov.uk or by telephone 01452 753221.

The Physical and Mental Well-Being Group, which monitors diversity matters, will also be kept updated on the Plan.

As part of the monitoring process to establish current disability data the Cultural Change Manager will visit all fire service teams to introduce the Scheme. This is intended to provide a more effective way of making staff aware of the Scheme and its intent, as a part of effective performance management.

We will maintain contact and communication with those community groups who assisted us to shape the Scheme so they can see with confidence that we are meaningful in our intent to promote disability issues as part of our wider approach to diversity, both in employment and service delivery.

Disability Equality Scheme 2006 - 2009 Action Plan

Section 1 - Improving the Recruitment Process for Disabled People

Reference No:	Subject	Action	Evidence	Responsible Person	Timescale
1A	Monitoring Arrangements	Staff involved in recruitment processes to ensure data relating to disabilities of applicants is gathered.	Annual data available relating to applicants/staff.	Personnel and Development Manager	March 2007
1B	Review Recruitment and Selection Training	Ensure staff involved in the assessment and/or recruitment processes are fully aware of their responsibilities within the DDA and use best practice.	Training programme and targeted individuals.	Personnel and Development Manager	March 2008
1C	Positive Action initiatives	Develop initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of employment within the Fire and Rescue Service from people with disabilities.	Increase in number of disabled applicants	Personnel and Development Manager Cultural Change Manager	September 2007
1D	Disability Champion	Identify "champion" for the Fire and Rescue Service	Identifiable "champion"	Cultural Change Manager	March 2007
1E	Review of Symbol ✓✓	Ensure standards of the "double tick" are adopted and complied with	Inclusion of standards in job application information	Personnel and Development Manager Cultural Change Manager	March 2008
1F	Job Descriptions and Person Specifications	Audit all Job Descriptions and Person Specifications applying Equality Impact Assessment to support the process.	Completed EIAs and "discrimination free" JDs and Person Specs	Personnel and Development Team	March 2008
1G	Current workforce	Survey current workforce to encourage self-declaration.	Reviewed data post survey.	Cultural Change Manager	June 2007
1H	Work Experience	20% of work experience placements to be offered to youngsters with disabilities	Target % met	Youth Diversionsary Manager	March 2008

Section 2 - Access to Services - Communication, Consultation and Involvement

Reference No:	Subject	Action	Evidence	Responsible Person	Timescale
2A	GFRS literature and information	Ensure all internally produced public information can be made available in appropriate formats on request.	Samples of literature	Internal Authors of literature Community and Equalities Team	March 2008
2B	GFRS websites	Ensure GFRS websites meet RNIB standards. Audit in partnership with RNIB.	Completed audit	Communications Manager	June 2007
2C	Fire Safety Advice	A Fire Safety information in British Sign Language is available and linked to external website.	Completed link	Communications Manager Cultural Change Manager	September 2007
2D	999 Calls	Continue exploration of texting services to improve effective emergency calls for assistance from deaf and hard of hearing people.	System in operation	Emergency Control Manager	September 2007
2E	Continued consultation	Communication Team to co-ordinate and support future consultations across the Service. Appointment of a member of Communications Team with Consultation reference.	Minutes of meetings	Communications Manager	November 2007
2F	Communicating with the communities.	Provide follow-up training opportunities for those trained in basic sign language. Train a number of firefighters and staff carrying out appropriate roles to British Sign Language Level 1.	Increased confidence and ability of firefighters to communicate in this way	Station Managers Training Manager Cultural Change Manager	March 2007 March 2008
2G	Smoke Alarms for Deaf people	Explore funding opportunities to increase supply of alarms to this community	Increase in ownership	Community Liaison Manager	March 2008

Section 3 - Access to Service Premises

Reference No:	Subject	Action	Evidence	Responsible Person	Timescale
3A	Access to all fire and rescue service premises	<p>Develop the current strategy to ensure all community fire stations and Service Headquarters are fully accessible for people with a range of disabilities.</p> <p>In particular focus upon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wheelchair users – entrance – circulation – accessible toilets • Visual impairments – signage, tactile surfaces • Hearing difficulties – provision (and testing/maintenance) of loop systems 	Audit trail of plans/provisions	Facilities Manager	Annual progress of programme