
ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY - CHILDREN'S SERVICES
(SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DISABILITY)

Responsible Cabinet Member, Councillor Cyndi Hughes,
Children and Young People Portfolio

Responsible Director - Suzanne Joyner,
Director of Children and Adults Services

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To request Cabinet approval of the Children's Services Accessibility Strategy ([the Strategy attached as **Appendix 1**) and the actions required to comply with legislation including the Equality Impact Assessment (attached as **Appendix 2**).

Summary

2. All local authorities are required by Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 [the Act] to prepare an accessibility strategy [the Strategy] in relation to schools for which it is the responsible¹ body.
3. By means of the Strategy Darlington Borough Council will support all its maintained schools and to provide guidance, where practicable, to Academy schools to meet the legal requirements of the Children and Families Act and Section 10 of the Equality Act 2010 together with the related legislation.
4. The Strategy sets out the three main areas of the Duty with some examples of how schools can meet their duties and includes a template Accessibility Plan for schools to use.
5. The Strategy links to the Special Education Needs Inclusion and Commissioning Strategy and the Local Offer and explains the legal requirements and the Council's actions to meet them.

¹ As defined in the Act, schools for which the Local Authority has responsibility includes maintained schools, maintained nursery schools and Pupil Referral Unit

6. Members should take into account the consultation responses received and **must read the equality impact assessment in full, rather than only relying on the summary information set out in this report**

Recommendation

7. It is recommended that Cabinet :-
 - (a) Agree the Accessibility Strategy
 - (b) Note the Equality Impact Assessment

Reasons

8. The recommendations are supported as it is the Local Authority statutory duty to have an Accessibility Plan for the schools for which it is responsible.

**Suzanne Joyner,
Director of Children and Adults Services**

Background Papers

1. Strategy
2. Equality Impact Assessment

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S17 Crime and Disorder	No recommendations from this report
Health and Well Being	Support schools to provide accessible facilities, environment, curriculum and information to enhance children's life chances and opportunities to thrive. This includes prevention and early intervention.
Carbon Impact	Schools are both encouraged, and where works are undertaken by the Local Authority in support of accessible environments, that these are done with the highest regard to sustainability and aim to reduce the carbon footprint and environmental resources.
Diversity	The principles of inclusion, (equality and diversity) are set out in the Strategy. Schools should work with parents, carers and the wider community to create greater understanding of differences and to remove barriers and potential barriers to participation and achievement.
Wards Affected	The maintained schools and settings to which this Strategy applies are: Redhall and Lingfield (Redhall Primary School), Whinfield (Whinfield Primary School), Pierremont (George Dent Nursery School), North Road (Rise Carr Pupil Referral Unit and Harrowgate Hill Primary School) , Park East (Borough Road Nursery School) Eastbourne (St Teresa's RC VA Primary School)
Groups Affected	Children and Young People at maintained schools and settings.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	Yes - This Strategy affects more than one ward.
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Children with the best start in life Enough support for people when needed
Efficiency	The outcome of this report will enable the Council to support maintained schools in the most efficient manner to improve their Accessibility plans.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

9. A task and finish group was set up to steer the development of the Strategy, reporting to the Children's Services Directorate Management Team (DMT). This group will monitor implementation and report annually to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.
10. An equality impact assessment has been undertaken, and alongside the consultation, findings will inform the final Strategy. The EIA is a dynamic document and should continue to be so throughout delivery of support and monitoring of the Strategy.
11. The Strategy sets out the areas for which the Local Authority should set out guidance for the schools for which it is responsible:
 - (a) Increasing participation in the school curriculum - Schools are responsible for providing a broad and well balanced curriculum including the wider curriculum such as enrichment activities and school trips.
 - (b) Improving the physical environment of schools - Physical environment includes the school buildings and facilities as well as physical aids to access education.
 - (c) Improving the delivery of information - The School Information (England) Amendment Regulations 2012 details the minimum requirements for information which must be provided on school websites and reproduced as a paper copy without charge on request by parents/carers.
12. Under this same legislation all schools must have accessibility plans which should be reviewed every three years.
13. The Strategy recommends that schools accessibility plans remain a separate document which is therefore more readily accessed and understood. The Strategy provides schools with a template to support development of their Accessibility Plans.
14. In addition to the research, best practice and Accessibility Plan template presented in the Strategy, a training package has been scoped which will support the audit, review and further development of maintained school's Accessibility Plan's. Training will be rolled out to these schools following Cabinet approval in the Summer Term 2016/17.
15. The Local Authority wishes to provide a traded service for Academy schools to do the same. Academies have been requested to provide an expression of interest in the training in order for time for the appropriate procurement to take place in order to deliver the traded service in 2017/18.

Financial Implications

16. There are no financial implications. Resource was identified in 2016 in order to appoint an equalities consultant to support Children's Services to develop the Strategy, to support consultation, and to deliver training to maintained schools.

Legal Implications

17. The SEND Code of Practice 2014 (updated January 2015), states that 'The Local Authority has made regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010), to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between disabled and non-disabled children and young people when carrying out their functions', and, 'The Local Authority has published information to demonstrate their compliance with this general duty and published objectives which are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound to achieve the core aims of the general duty'.
18. Therefore, in researching and developing the Strategy, Darlington Borough Council has met its statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 as explained above, but also
- Reasonable adjustments duty (schedule 13 of the Equality Act 2010)
 - Children and Families Act 2014
 - Supporting children and young people at school with medical conditions (DfE September 2014)

HR Implications

19. There are no HR implications. Capacity has been identified within Children Services to manage the maintained schools training and to lead on annual monitoring and reporting.

Corporate Landlord Advice

20. It is not applicable to seek advice from Corporate Landlord in development of the Strategy.

Consultation

21. Consultation took place between 16 December 2016 and concluded on 3 February 2017.
22. Previous to this Schools Governing Bodies were alerted to the piece of work to review the Strategy and also their own responsibilities by means of a Local Authority briefing paper in the Autumn Term 2016.
23. Consultation took place with all Darlington schools, Darlington Association on Disability, Darlington Youth Partnership and the Children and Young People scrutiny committee considered the draft Strategy. Meetings were held and all stakeholders have had access to the Strategy, and an on-line questionnaire.

Outcome of Consultation

24. Where schools have considered the Strategy, they have used the best practice to benchmark their own policies and Accessibility plan. The consultation made schools aware of the need to prioritise a review of their Accessibility plans. Meetings with approximately a third of schools were undertaken and feedback suggested some specific areas in which Darlington's needs could be strengthened in the Equality Impact Assessment and the Strategy, supporting schools to support children/young people with special educational need (SEN).
25. In response to this, the Strategy was updated to reflect resources available to support Children and Young People with SEN. Schools have been advised of findings and training will cover consultation points where appropriate.