



**Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service**

Disability Discrimination Order (Northern Ireland) 2006

Draft Disability Action Plan for Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service

May 2007

The Disability Action Plan can be obtained from us in alternative formats, including large print, Braille, disk and audio cassette. You can also download it from our website.

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

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Foreword

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service has pledged to fulfil its statutory obligations in relation to equality, fairness and inclusion.

Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006) places new duties on public authorities, when carrying out their functions to have due regard to the need to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life

This Disability Action Plan sets out how we propose to do this. Through a series of actions we will ensure that all NIFRS Board Members, senior management and employees are aware of the new disability duties and how disability equality can be more effectively mainstreamed into all that we do.

Colin J Lammey
Chief Fire Officer

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1. Introduction

1.1 The disability duties are enshrined in Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006). The disability duties requires us in carrying out our functions to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life

1.2 Under Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995), we are required to submit a Disability Action Plan to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. This Plan must show how we propose to fulfil these duties in relation to the functions of our Service.

1.3 We will undertake effective communication of the Plan through a planned programme of awareness raising and training on the disability duties for all Board Members and staff.

2. Purpose of the disability action plan

2.1 This Plan outlines our proposals for compliance with Section 49A of the DDA 1995 as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006 (DDO).

3 NIFRS – its role, functions and policies

3.1 Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service provide a statutory and unique firefighting and rescue service to 1.7 million people in Northern Ireland. Our Mission is:

‘To deliver a fire and rescue service and work in partnership with others to ensure the safety and well-being of our community’.

3.2 We perform a number of principal roles on behalf of the community:

- efficient mobilisation of Firefighters and appliances to all emergencies
- extinguishing fires while saving lives
- protecting the environment and property
- responding to road traffic collisions and collapsed buildings
- provision of specialist rescue services

3.3 In addition to the fundamental role of protecting our community, we also undertake the following key strategic functions:

- training and development of NIFRS professionals
- business continuity planning for impacts upon the Service and community regarding major disasters
- partnership working with other emergency services
- targeted community safety education initiatives

3.4 We have adopted a range of plans, policies and procedures to support and implement the above and to provide a world-class Fire and Rescue service to the people of Northern Ireland.

4 Public life positions

4.1 NIFRS has responsibility over the following public life positions:

- NIFRS Board Members

5 Commitment to the effective implementation of the Disability Action Plan

5.1 The NIFRS Board and Chief Fire Officer are committed to the effective implementation of all aspects of the Disability Action Plan in all parts of the Service. All necessary resources will be allocated in order to meet this aim.

5.2 As part of our corporate planning process, we will build objectives, targets and monitoring into all relevant Business Plans and Priorities and Targets. These will be reflected in all levels of planning. In accordance with current practice for targets contained in strategic and functional plans, progress on meeting disability duties objectives will be monitored and reported to the Chief Fire Officer, Principal Officers and Directors Group and to the Service Support Committee of the NIFRS Board.

- 5.3 We will include a formal progress report on meeting the objectives in our annual report to the Equality Commission. Progress will also be reported in the NIFRS Annual Report.

6 Internal Arrangements

- 6.1 The NIFRS Board is charged with providing fire and rescue services across the province and is funded by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The Board comprises a non-executive Chair, the Chief Fire Officer and 8 non-executive Members, some of whom are District Councillors nominated by the Northern Ireland Local Government Association.
- 6.2 The NIFRS Board meets monthly in full session and also regularly throughout the year in committees. The Board appoints Service Delivery, Service Support, Audit, Remuneration and Joint Negotiating Committees. These Committees are advisory and their function is to report and make recommendations to the Board. The Chair and Chief Fire Officer of the Board are ex-officio Members of all Committees with the exception of the Audit Committee. The Chief Fire Officer is not a Member of the Remuneration Committee.

6.3 Functions of the Committees are:

- Service Delivery Committee – responsible for the strategic oversight of Service Delivery matters within the references of the Directors of Operations and Community Development.
- Service Support Committee – responsible for the oversight of Service Support matters within the references of the Directors of Technical Development, Human Resources, Finance & Performance Management and Corporate Affairs & Planning.
- Audit Committee – responsible for ensuring that all the Board’s financial and operating systems reflect best practice, that conform to Departmental requirements and have adequate safeguards against fraud, theft and irregularities.
- Remuneration Committee – the Committee meets as required and reports to the Board on salaries and conditions of service for Principal Officers and Directors.

6.4 The Chief Fire Officer oversees the work of NIFRS Area Commands and functional departments through the Principal Officers and Directors Group and the Senior Management Group. There are 7 functional Directorates in total:

- Chief Executive's Department
- Operations
- Community Development
- Human Resources
- Technical Development
- Finance & Performance Management
- Planning & Corporate Affairs.

6.5 The Chief Fire Officer is responsible for the strategic direction of NIFRS and, through the Principal Officers and Directors Group, oversight of the day to day management of Service Directorates and operations. This also extends to the longer term planning and allocation of resources. Statutory responsibility for ensuring the DDO is implemented effectively also lies at this level. As part of our corporate planning process, we will deliver smart targets relating to the disability duties. Our Equality Manager will be responsible for the co-ordination of actions undertaken by responsible officers in relation to the Disability Action Plan and for reporting progress to the Chief Fire Officer and NIFRS Board. The current Equality Manager is Adèle Davidson as detailed on pages 27.

7 Effective engagement

7.1 We are committed to engaging with disabled people in the drafting, implementation, monitoring and review of this Plan.

Further information on how this will be achieved is outlined in Section 10 on Consultation.

8. Annual report

8.1 We will prepare an annual report on the implementation of our Plan. This report will be included as part of the annual report to the Equality Commission which details our progress on the implementation of our Equality Scheme.

8.2 A copy of the annual report will be made available on our website. The NIFRS website has been updated to improve accessibility for people with various types of visual disabilities (we work towards level AA of the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0).

9 Five Year Review

9.1 We will carry out a five year review of the Plan in consultation with the Equality Commission and it will be made available on our website.

10 Consultation

10.1 We are committed to carrying out meaningful consultation in the development of our Disability Action Plan. In doing so we will contact targeted groups based on our own consultation list and

that provided by the Equality Commission. We will place the Plan on our website and engage individually with groups/individuals expressing an interest in our proposals for implementing the disability duties. The Plan will also be advertised in the Belfast Telegraph, Irish News and News Letter. We will liaise with the Employers Forum on Disability, of which we are a member organisation.

10.2 Consultation with local disability groups will ensure that disabled people can assist NIFRS by:

- identifying barriers encountered by disabled people in relation to their dealings with us.
- identifying past examples where we have not promoted positive attitudes towards disabled people and identifying future opportunities to promote positive attitudes.
- setting priorities and identifying solutions to take remedial action.
- monitoring and reviewing how effective these measures have been.

10.3 Consultation may take the form of face to face meetings, consultation panels, surveys, e-consultation via NIFRS website and other good practice methodologies. We will make sure documents are available in alternative formats including large print, Braille, disc and audio cassette. Such information will be

made available in a timely fashion. We will establish with disabled people the basis for dialogue and engagement during the life of the Plan.

10.4 We believe it is important that disabled people are involved in the implementation, monitoring and review of the Plan. Table 1 of this document outlines the initiatives NIFRS wishes to implement. We wish to seek your views and comments on these actions and may amend them or include additional ones following the comments received.

11 Action measures

11.1 We have already taken a number of measures to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage their participation in public life:

- NIFRS contributed to national guidance for UK fire and rescue services on DDA Part II Employment Matters. This guidance was written by the Disability Rights Commission in collaboration with representatives from fire & rescue services in GB and NI.
- Consideration of reasonable adjustments in the workplace for disabled people now extended to Firefighter employees.
- Disability Awareness is included in staff fairness, equality and dignity at work training. Specific disability awareness training has been rolled-out for NIFRS headquarters staff.

- A series of deaf awareness training sessions have been undertaken.
- The NIFRS website has been improved and now meets the 'AA' standard. We are working to further improve accessibility.
- We have a textphone facility at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters.
- We work in partnership with Stepping Stones to provide placements for 3 adult trainees with learning disabilities under the Step Toward Employment Scheme (STEP). The benefits of this relationship are reciprocal.
- We are members of the Employers Forum on Disability.
- We place a regular advertisement in 'Able' Magazine, highlighting our aim to be an 'Employer of Choice'.
- All capital works programmes are DDA compliant and our Estates Strategy reflects this. An accessibility audit of premises has been carried out for all NIFRS locations and portable ramps, induction loops and alterations have been implemented. Armagh Fire Station was identified as being non-compliant with DDA and this has been one of the key drivers for relocating the Station.
- All current and proposed policies are screened in accordance with our Equality Scheme to ensure that they do not have an adverse impact on any of the nine equality dimensions, which includes people with disabilities. This,

together with monitoring the effect of policies is an ongoing process.

- We have accommodated reasonable adjustments for staff with disabilities to meet the needs and improve the working environment.
- Notification of all support staff vacancies to Disablement Advisory Officers at Job Centres.
- Guaranteed shortlisting for those with a disability who meet the essential criteria for posts. We actively seek to identify if applicants have specific needs in relation to their disability to enable their progression through our recruitment and selection processes.
- All NIFRS public documents can be made available in alternative formats.

12 Timescale for implementing the action measures

12.1 Table 1 below outlines our proposed action measures to be fully effective by June 2012 in order to implement the disability duties. We intend to carry out a mid-point review in October 2009. The table details the performance indicator/targets, actions, timescale and the officers responsible for carrying out the actions.

Table 1

Duty 1: to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people				
Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Milestones	Responsibility	Timescale
Ensure prominence of disability action plan within NIFRS	➤ Identify responsibility for management of disability action plan	July 2007	Chief Fire Officer	July 2007
	➤ Develop 'disability equality policy' and 'recruitment and retention of disabled employees policy' for all staff	Full consultation with draft stakeholders by December 2007	Employment Policy Manager	March 2008
Disabled peoples' views taken on board in NIFRS decision making processes	Embed the disability duties into our corporate consultation processes. Include an additional question to Section 75 screening proforma to focus on assessment of impacts of disability duties on policies	Evidence of engagement and influence in consultation reports, July 2007 onwards	Area Commander, Operations (IRMP consultations)/ Equality Manager	March 2008

Table 1 Continued

Duty 1: to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people				
Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Milestones	Responsibility	Timescale
Corporate communications compliance with disability duties	➤ Continue to maintain accessibility of website to AA level	Monthly review from July 2007	Corporate Communications Manager/IT Manager	March 2008 ongoing
	➤ Maintain Crystal Mark for website, aiming for an easy to use and easy to read website	Annual review of Crystal Mark standards	Corporate Communications Manager/IT Manager	March 2008
	➤ Consider production of a new intranet site to ensure accessibility	Review by March 2008	IT Manager	March 2009
	Include regular feature on disability in new 'Fair Point' NIFRS Equality Bulletin	September 2007	Equality Manager	March 2008

Table 1 Continued

Duty 1: to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people				
Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Milestones	Responsibility	Timescale
Corporate communications compliance with disability duties	➤ Any proposed new internal magazine for NIFRS staff to include regular feature on equality and disability matters	Review by March 2008	Corporate Communications Manager	March 2008 ongoing
	➤ Continue to place positive attitude advertisements and articles in 'Able' Magazine and research additional publications for outreach	Increased advertising activity by December 2007	Equality Manager	March 2008 ongoing

Table 1 Continued

Duty 1: to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people				
Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Milestones	Responsibility	Timescale
Corporate communications compliance with disability duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Include photography in publications and website using positive imagery of people with disabilities who are service users and those in the NIFRS environment 	Quarterly review of publications to ensure positive imagery	Assistant Chief Fire Officer Community Development/ Area Commander Operations/ Corporate Communications Manager/ Equality Manager	March 2009
Create more positive attitudes and skills among staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Deliver disability awareness training to all staff 	All new staff to receive training as part of induction by March 2008	Equality Manager/ Employment Policy Manager/ Recruitment & Services Manager	March 2008 ongoing

Table 1 Continued

Duty 1: to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people				
Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Milestones	Responsibility	Timescale
Create more positive attitudes and skills among staff	➤ Conduct a review of operational training procedures in relation to rescue of disabled persons	Review by March 2008	Area Commanders	March 2008 ongoing
	➤ Future recruitment and selection panels to be trained in disability duties and disability awareness	Review by March 2008	Recruitment & Services Manager	March 2008 ongoing
	➤ Review Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection to include reference to guaranteed shortlisting for people with disabilities where candidate meets minimum essential criteria for post	Review by September 2007	Recruitment & Services Manager	March 2008

Table 1 Continued

Duty 1: to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people				
Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Milestones	Responsibility	Timescale
Create more positive attitudes and skills among staff	➤ Establish monitoring of all diversity training and include in annual Section 75 progress report to Equality Commission.	Initial review by August 2007	Equality Manager	March 2008
Acquire accurate quantitative data	➤ Monitor applicants, shortlisted applicants and appointees with disabilities	Baseline data on 'Peodesy' by August 2007	Equality Officer	March 2008
Provide work experience for people with disabilities	➤ Continue to develop partnership with Stepping Stones. Seek to support additional organisations where possible	Provision of placements in appropriate NIFRS environments, where possible	Principal Officers and Directors/Area Commanders/ Equality Manager/ Recruitment & Services Manager	March 2008 ongoing

Table 1 Continued

Duty 2: to encourage participation by disabled people in public life				
Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Milestones	Responsibility	Timescale
Full understanding among Board Members of disability duties and impacts for the Service	➤ Promotion of disability awareness including disability duties under DDO as part of induction and training programme for Board Members	Yearly review of induction and training programme content	Director of Human Resources	March 2008 ongoing
Active outreach to disabled people	➤ Attend careers fairs, interview skills training and site visits to promote NIFRS career opportunities for people with disabilities	Increased number of disabled applicants and appointees by March 2009	Equality Manager/ Recruitment & Services Manager	March 2009 ongoing

Table 1 Continued

Duty 2: to encourage participation by disabled people in public life				
Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Milestones	Responsibility	Timescale
Active outreach to disabled people	➤ Provide details of publicly advertised NIFRS vacancies to Disablement Advisory Service and other disability organisations	Review by December 2007 to ensure target audience is being reached	Recruitment & Services Manager	March 2008 ongoing
	➤ Creation of a monitoring system of the reasonable adjustments made for employees with disabilities	Initial assessment by December 2007	Group Commander Occupational Health & Welfare/Health & Safety Adviser/ Employment Policy Manager/Equality Manager	March 2008 ongoing
	➤ Inclusion of welcoming statement in recruitment advertisements	Review by December 2007	Recruitment & Services Manager	March 2008

Table 1 Continued

Duty 2: to encourage participation by disabled people in public life				
Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Milestones	Responsibility	Timescale
Active outreach to disabled people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensure that Community Development Strategy includes engagement with people with disabilities as part of its targeted home safety and youth initiatives 	<p>Initiatives reviewed by March 2008</p>	<p>Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Community Development</p>	<p>March 2008 ongoing</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensure that Integrated Risk Management Planning includes data collection on dwellings and areas of risk pertaining to people with disabilities 	<p>Activities reviewed by March 2008</p>	<p>Area Commander Operations</p>	<p>March 2008 ongoing</p>

Table 1 Continued

Duty 2: to encourage participation by disabled people in public life				
Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Milestones	Responsibility	Timescale
Improved accessibility and opportunities within NIFRS working environments	➤ Assess impact of Government new 'Workable' Programme for employees who have or develop a disability to remain in work	Meet with Programme representatives in consideration of any future participation by December 2007	Recruitment & Services Manager/ Employment Policy Manager/ Equality Manager	March 2008 ongoing
	➤ Maintain programme of capital works that is DDA compliant and ensures accessibility of all NIFRS premises	Review of accessibility audit by March 2008	Estates Manager	March 2008 ongoing

13 Targets

- 13.1 We are committed to monitoring and reviewing the progress of this Plan to ensure that the disability duties are being met.
- 13.2 The monitoring of progress on the milestones and timescales contained in the Plan will be reported on quarterly, in line with reporting requirements on other organisation plans, priorities and targets.
- 13.3 The targets set are to cover a one year period in the first year as we want to ensure we meet the practical needs of disabled persons on a timely basis. Work will continue throughout the lifespan of the Plan with a view to full, effective mainstreaming by 2012.

14 How the disability action plan will be published

14.1 Following submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, this Plan will be available by contacting:

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Textphone: 028 9262 8800
Email: adele.davidson@nifrs.org

14.2 The availability of the Disability Action Plan will be advertised in the following papers:

Belfast Telegraph
Irish News
News Letter

It may be accessed on our website at: www.nifrs.org

14.3 We acknowledge that disabled people may experience different barriers according to their type of impairment so we will endeavour to ensure appropriate ways of communicating the Plan. The Plan will be produced in clear print and plain language and will be made available in accessible formats on request, which may include Braille, large print, disc and audio cassette. The Plan may also be made available in languages other than English on request.

14.4 In addition, all employees will receive a summary Plan and be - provided with a full Plan on request.