

Habinteg's Disability Equality Scheme

I What is a Disability Equality Scheme?

A Disability Equality Scheme (DES) is a plan that shows how an organisation will promote disability equality and how it will make sure that the things it does meet the needs of disabled people better. The law says that some public bodies have to develop a DES. Habinteg is not one of these 'named' public bodies, but because its focus is on equality in housing for disabled and non-disabled people, it has decided to develop one.

The plan should reflect:

- priorities of disabled people that are identified through involvement;
- strategic priorities of the organisation, including business plans and major projects to be implemented over the timescale of DES;
- evidence of where the problems and priorities lie;
- specific outcomes which the authority wishes to achieve to promote disability equality, set out against a realistic timetable;
- measurable indicators of progress towards those outcomes;
- lines of accountability.

A very important part of developing a DES is involving disabled people at every stage. Habinteg engaged disabled consultants to develop the DES and they have been working with disabled tenants and employees who volunteered to help with the DES.

2 The Context

2.1 Habinteg's purpose

Habinteg Housing Association is the leading national provider of affordable accessible homes. Habinteg has dual aims: the provision of high quality homes and services; and the promotion of accessible and inclusive housing¹. It builds Lifetime Homes and wheelchair standard properties, so that disabled and non-disabled people can live together in sustainable communities.

Habinteg's objectives include: developing their expertise in housing and disability; developing affordable, innovative and accessible housing; and promoting universal housing design. The DES will help it to meet these objectives, as well as to ensure that disabled people's needs are effectively addressed in meeting their other corporate objectives:

- Providing excellent homes and efficient services that meet the needs of all our customers;
- Developing support services that enable disabled people to live as independently as they choose;
- Offering services to other organisations that improve their performance in delivering housing opportunities to disabled people;
- Conducting research that establishes better practice in creating housing opportunities for disabled people;
- Ensuring the involvement of disabled people in leading the organisation's development;
- Ensuring the long term financial viability of the organisation by generating a 5% return on activity.

2.2 Habinteg's current position

2.2.1 Coverage

Habinteg is currently established in all England's Housing Corporation regions and has a scheme in Wales and sister associations in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. It now has 2,120 homes, of which 530 were built specifically for wheelchair users and the rest to Lifetime Homes standards.

2.2.2 Research and Campaigning

Habinteg undertakes and publishes research into the housing needs of disabled people. Its recently published 'Different Paths' report focused on the barriers experienced by disabled people from black and ethnic minority communities in getting and keeping suitable housing.

2.2.3 Employment

Habinteg was awarded the Investors in People standard in 2000 and this was renewed in 2006. Investors in People requires Habinteg to address the development needs of its employees, but does not cover disability issues particularly effectively.

Currently Habinteg records 6% disabled employees, using traditional definitions but over 20% of employees have had a reasonable adjustment. It is likely that a significant number of disabled employees do not self-identify and Habinteg needs to increase the number that do, or improve representation of disabled staff.

2.2.4 External factors

Housing associations – especially smaller associations – are increasingly looking to join together, because of the pressures from funding organisations and the increase in the number of associations resulting from stock transfers and the creation of Arms Length Management Organisations.

Supporting People budgets have effectively been reducing and the introduction of individual budgets – as a result of the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit's report 'Improving Life Chances' – will probably have an impact on Supporting People that Habinteg needs to address.

The new housing provisions in the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 are likely to raise disabled people's expectations of housing providers.

3 Habinteg functions

Habinteg's main activity is letting and managing homes. This is how it defines what it does:

Employment: Habinteg employs full and part-time staff working in the Head Office, the Regional Office and the scheme offices. Some of these staff have customer facing roles and some do not.

Procurement: Habinteg purchases products and services for various functions within the organisation, including maintenance and development of housing and office facilities.

Development and design: Habinteg develops accessible housing and accessible design standards for housing.

Establishing a tenancy: Applicants are asked to read (or have read to them) the terms of their tenancy and sign to agree to these terms. These terms include what is acceptable and not acceptable including anti-social behaviour.

Property lettings: Properties are allocated to applicants through Habinteg's waiting lists, local authority nominations (including Choice Based Lettings and Accessible Housing Registers) or tenant transfer between properties.

Rent Collection: Habinteg has an arrears policy for tenants who fail to pay their rent on time. Debt recovery agencies will also be used if necessary.

Adaptations: Habinteg covers the cost for some minor home adaptations and offers assistance through the Disabled Facilities Grant process for major adaptations. Habinteg also employs an Occupational Therapist to facilitate the aids and adaptations service.

Repairs: Habinteg carries out repairs on its properties on a case by case basis or as part of major improvement schemes.

Dealing with harassment and anti-social behaviour: Scheme staff and Area Managers deal with complaints of harassment and anti-social behaviour, identify victims and perpetrators and take appropriate action as specified in the policy and procedure manual. Human Resources will deal with any harassment and anti-social behaviour towards staff other than by tenants, or between staff.

Information and support: Various key functions in the organisation provide information in a variety of formats to staff, customers and external agencies and authorities. Staff also provide support to tenants in a range of ways.

Tenant involvement: One of Habinteg's core business objectives is to sustain effective and accountable relationships with tenants and partners through local involvement initiatives and membership of the Board and committees.

Feedback and complaints: Habinteg welcomes complaints and compliments relating to staff or levels of service.

Campaigning: Habinteg has a strong commitment to campaigning for better designed, more accessible housing for disabled people and the ageing population.

Research: To reinforce its campaigning role, Habinteg carries out research into finding better solutions to housing design and supply, housing management, independent living and support for disabled people.

Governance/Management: The association is governed by tenants and other non-executive representatives who hold staff accountable for best value performance.

Involving disabled people

One of the important aspects of a DES is that disabled people should be involved in the development, monitoring and review of the scheme.

In developing this first version of the DES, we have involved disabled tenants and disabled staff and the process has been led by disabled consultants. Tenants were asked if they wanted to be involved via the tenant representatives and also using a flier in the tenant newsletter.

One of the actions for the DES is to improve the level of involvement of both staff and tenants in the future. Involvement is needed to monitor the actions to ensure they are achieved, and to review the DES in three years' time.

In the tenants' survey, disabled people wanted to become more involved, including at Board level, and expressed a preference for open and local meetings, phone contact and contact by community assistant. These preferences will need to be taken into account when involving disabled people.

4 Impact assessment

A number of documents were used by the consultants in identifying the 'impacts' or effects of Habinteg's current activities on disabled people. The documents used included Operations Management Team minutes, a tenant survey, an employee survey and reports. Habinteg's internet and intranet sites were also used, mostly to look at employment and customer service policies.

A table of impacts was drawn up and disabled tenants and staff were asked to comment on it. Not surprisingly, the impacts focussed on employment and service delivery issues as these issues have the largest day to day impact on customers and staff. Where the impact was negative, an action to remedy or improve this was identified and put into draft action plan, which was then consulted on. This led to the development of the Action Plan.

In addition to the action plan, Habinteg is committed to establishing key internal performance indicators to measure our progress on disability equality issues. These measures will be reviewed as part of the DES annual review process at the Board.

Habinteg Key Disability Performance Indicators:

Number of reasonable adjustments carried out for employees

% satisfaction rate with adjustments completed

% of disabled staff

% of disabled staff with a current Personal Development Plan

% of staff completing a Disability Equality Training session within last 24 months

% of recruited disabled staff

% of disabled Board members

% satisfaction rates of disabled customers, in comparison with non-disabled customers – to include repairs, customer service, harassment and ease of involvement

% satisfaction with adaptations service

% of offices meeting Habinteg access standards

% of new homes meeting Habinteg's access standards

The tasks in the Action Plan are shown in Table form in the separate document:

Habinteg DES Action Plan.