



PENSIONS OMBUDSMAN

DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

May 2008

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1.0 INTRODUCTION/FOREWORD

I am pleased to launch the Disability Equality Scheme for the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman. My staff and I have a commitment to equal opportunities and diversity; and the Disability Equality Scheme is part of this overall approach.

Our commitment to Equal Opportunities ensures that all our working policies and practices are inclusive and fair; as well as compliant with the Public Sector Equality Duties.

The Disability Equality Scheme is an important milestone in our Equal Opportunities journey as it aims to ensure that:

- We include employees and customers in our planning and consultation and processes;
- We will collect and monitor data to inform our decisions;
- We will conduct reviews of relevant policy areas;
- We will keep our staff and customers informed; and
- Our managers are skilled to take appropriate action to promote positive attitudes; and also to tackle any discriminatory practices.

As part of our continuing commitment to involve customers with disabilities; we will consider setting up a forum for customers with disabilities and consult and seek advice on how to take forward our Disability Equality Scheme.

This document outlines our commitment as well as an action plan to progress this commitment. Our management team are committed to this and to continuous improvement of our employment and customer service practices.

Tony King

Pensions Ombudsman

2.0 OUR COMMITMENT TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

We believe that disabled people should have full opportunities and choices to improve the quality of their lives. As an organisation that investigates complaints in an impartial manner, we view the handling of our employees and customers in the same way.

To achieve this we will:

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and others.
- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).
- Ensure that as far as possible, we make reasonable adjustments to meet the specific requirements of employees and customers with disabilities.
- Not tolerate harassment of any kind towards any of our employees or the public.
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons.
- Ensure that our organisation is designed to be easily accessible to all. In particular we pride ourselves in ensuring we reside in a building that provides ease of use for disabled people.
- Nominate a member of the Senior Management Team to take personal responsibility for developing our approach to disability issues and awareness.

3.0 KEY PRIORITIES

A. Involving & Engaging with People with Disabilities

In February we conducted a customer satisfaction survey and for the first time we included a monitoring form which requested information on disability and related needs.

21% of the respondents said they had one or more disabilities; and the following table gives a breakdown on the type of disability.

Disability	Respondent Rate
Physical	8
Sensory	4
Mental Health	4
Learning Difficulties	1
Long Standing Illness	2
Other	1

Of these, four respondents said they had specific needs. We will continue to engage with them and other customers with disabilities in the most meaningful way to explore how these needs can be best met.

B. Recruitment & Employee Development

We follow Civil Service practice on recruitment. At present we have around 40 employees and are not aware of any employees with a disability. When recruiting we offer guaranteed interviews to suitable candidates with disabilities. We will continue to monitor the employee profile and provide appropriate support for any disabled employees.

All employees have equal access to development and promotion opportunities. We engage with employees through the Staff Communication Forum and also formally and informally through day to day business interactions such as team meetings and review meetings.

C. Being positive about Disabled People

The culture of our organisation is customer focussed and inclusive. We aim to ensure that all employees are made aware of their responsibilities in relation to promoting fairness within the organisation and that there is no direct or indirect discrimination against people with disabilities.

D. Procurement

We adopt best public sector practice in relation to procurement, and will continue to ensure that this is in accordance with the Public Sector Disability Equality Duty.

E. Access

Our organisation is designed to be easily accessible to all. We pride ourselves in ensuring that our building provides ease of use for disabled people. This includes:

- Three large lifts. Two of which are fitted with a delay that enables a wheelchair user to safely enter and leave in a comfortable manner.
- Disabled toilets.
- Ramps
- Power assisted front door.

Our staff are happy to assist visitors who have any special requests when visiting our building. Within reason, we will adapt our environment to make it more comfortable should the need arise.

F. Website

We are currently reviewing our website to make it more accessible; and will provide information on tape and in large print or Braille if required.

G. Policy Review

Over the next six months, we will review our policies including those in respect of communication, to ensure they accord with the Disability Equality Duty.

4.0 ACTION PLAN

The following action plan will be reviewed and monitored by the Management Team 2-3 times per year; and the actions will be implemented by the lead officer within the defined timescale.

Action	Lead Person	Timeline
<p>Monitoring – to continue to monitor customer and employee profiles in relation to disability.</p> <p>The Management Team to consider data quarterly.</p>	Business Manager and Casework Director	Ongoing.
<p>Communications – the key areas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To produce information in large print, tape and Braille if required. ➤ To improve our website in accordance with DDA guidance and the Public Sector Disability Equality Duty. 	Business Manager	As required. Six months.
<p>Policy reviews – review our policies in the following areas:</p> <p>Employee Recruitment</p> <p>Employee Development and Promotion</p> <p>Customer Complaints</p> <p>Communications Processes</p>	Business Manager	Six months.
<p>Training for Employees</p> <p>We will raise awareness of our employees on Equal Opportunities and in particular on disability.</p>	Business Manager	Three months.
<p>Involving & Engaging with Customers</p> <p>We will consider options for having a forum for customers with disabilities to seek input into key working practices and policies.</p>	A Member of the Senior Management Team with accessibility portfolio responsibility	Six months.