

Grampian Valuation Joint Board

Annual Disability Equality Report 2009

Disability equality is about offering full opportunity and choices for disabled people to improve their quality of life and be respected and included as equal members of society.

The Grampian Valuation Joint Board (GVJB) can make a significant contribution towards removing the barriers (both environmental and attitudinal) to equal opportunities for disabled people. The GVJB can do this by addressing the way in which we run our services and employ people.

The Disability duty has now been in place for three years. This places a general duty on Valuation Boards, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to:-

- promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act
- eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- encourage participation by disabled persons in public life
- take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons

The Disability Equality Scheme has 4 actions within its action plan, however the action plan relied heavily on consultation carried out by the Moray Council. It is therefore proposed that investigation be carried out to make actions more specific for the GVJB Grampian wide. The actions that were identified in the existing scheme are as follows:-

Disabled Parking

Because GVJB is spread over the Grampian area GVJB offices are located in three separate locations – Aberdeen, Banff and Elgin. Disabled parking provision has been assessed over all three office areas. Within Aberdeen, the Board's HQ is located within Woodhill House which is provided by Aberdeenshire Council. Although no disabled car parking is allocated to the GVJB there is provision of disabled car parking adjacent to the main public entrance where there is a ramp and automatic doors. The office in Banff has recently been moved to a new site and suitable provision for disabled parking has been allocated within the car park. . The office in Elgin is owned by the Moray Council, where disabled parking is available within the public car park adjacent to the building.

Information and Advocacy

The Assessor & ERO approached and presented information regarding the Board to the Aberdeen Disability Consortium (ADC). The ADC is an umbrella organisation which describes itself as “an independent community of groups and individuals with an interest in the rights and needs of people of all ages with any form of disability”. In discussion with ADC the primary area of concern lay with the issue of printed materials and in respect of individuals with sight problems. For the majority of residents within the Board’s geographic area the principal issue related to Electoral Registration material (canvass forms, individual registration forms and the Electoral Register itself). To enhance ease of access to information, all forms and correspondence are issued in Arial pt12 for ease of reading, however larger print or Braille is available on request.

Arising from the involvement of the ADC, contact was made with the Grampian Society for the Blind. Within the Board’s area there are between 2,500 and 3,000 blind or partially sighted people. Grampian Society for the Blind agreed to publish an article in their newsletter and speaking newspaper regarding Electoral Registration, however this did not result in any requests for electoral information in large print or Braille. It is proposed that easy access information be created from the equalities page on our website, to highlight translations that are available.

Translation & Interpretation Communication Support Services

GVJB has provided translation and interpretation on an ‘as or when required basis’. For example if the Board is approached for information in an alternative format, then the alternative format will be provided. In the same instance, if someone contacts the GVJB who reports difficulty in filling in forms, then the GVJB would arrange face-to-face contact with the person to assist in filling out the form.

It is however proposed that a system for accessing interpretation and translation services in an easy and effective manner should be established.

Employment & Training

The GVJB’s recruitment policy guarantees disabled applicants who meet the essential requirements of the person specification an interview for the post. A verification of employee data exercise has been carried out to try and establish a more accurate profile of staff within the GVJB. Due to the equal opportunities monitoring form being of a voluntary nature however, only 50% return was obtained.

Discussion is underway with the Moray Council to establish options of accessing local authority equal opportunities training for staff. It will be the responsibility of the Assessor to identify staff to attend such training provided by the Councils. In addition 6 GVJB staff will be trained to carry out equality impact assessments on all policies and procedures.

Summary

The GVJB Disability Equality Scheme was produced in 2007 and identified 4 actions to be carried out. We have taken on board these actions, however, recognise that in order to encourage disability equality we must produce actions independent of the Moray Council. Work is underway to engage with disabled groups and organisations to further investigate what can be done by GVJB to eliminate discrimination and advance equality. Information arising from the completion of our equality impact assessments will be used for the preparation of future action plans.