

# ST MATTHEW'S HOUSING ASSOCIATION

## DIABILITY ACTION PLAN

To promote positive attitudes towards disabled people

To encourage the participation of disabled people in Public Life

July 2015 to July 2018

## **Alternative Formats**

English: This Disability Action Plan can be made available in minority ethnic languages, on request, to meet the needs of those not fluent in English.

This Disability Action Plan can be obtained from St Matthew's Housing Association in alternative formats including large print, Braille, electronically, or on disk.

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

**Mr. Jim Black**

**58 Harper Street**

**Short Strand**

**Belfast BT5 4EN**

**Telephone 02890 451070**

**Fax 02890 454205**

**Email [office@smha.co.uk](mailto:office@smha.co.uk)**

**[www.smha.co.uk](http://www.smha.co.uk)**

Contents	Page
1. Background	4
2. Functions and responsibilities	6
3. Action Measures	10
Appendix 1	

## **Introduction**

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), St Matthew's Housing Association is required, when carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to:

Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and

Encourage participation by disabled people in public life ('the Disability Duties').

Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Association is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a Plan showing how it proposes to fulfill these duties in relation to its functions.

## **Commitments**

The Chair and Chief Executive are committed to effectively implementing the Disability Duties and this Plan.

## **Mainstreaming the Duties**

St Matthew's Housing Association is committed to successfully mainstreaming the Disability Duties throughout the organisation.

## **Resources**

In order to deliver the actions detailed in this Plan, the Association is aware that additional resources will have to be allocated. St Matthew's Housing Association is committed to allocating all reasonable, additional resources (in terms of people, time and money) required to implement this Plan.

## **Internal Arrangements**

St Matthew's Housing Association will put appropriate internal arrangements in place to ensure that the Disability Duties are complied with and the Plan is successfully implemented.

Jim Black will have operational responsibility for ensuring the implementation and monitoring of the Plan. Regular and Annual Progress Reports will be provided through the normal reporting structures.

## **Training**

St Matthew's Housing Association is committed to providing training for staff and office holders on Disability Equality legislation and Disability Awareness.

## **Reporting Arrangements**

St Matthew's Housing Association confirms its commitment to submitting Annual Progress Reports on the implementation of this Plan to the Equality Commission and carrying out a review of this Plan, in line with current review arrangements for Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This will ensure the alignment of Section 75 and disability duties.

A copy of this Plan, the Association's Annual Progress Reports and review of this Plan will be made available on the Association's website **Email office@smha.co.uk**

## **Functions**

A housing association is an independent voluntary organisation dedicated to helping people obtain good, affordable housing which meets their needs. A significant proportion of the work they do assists the government in the delivery of much-needed public services but they are not public bodies. In April 2004 the Registered Housing Associations in Northern Ireland came within the jurisdiction of the Commissioner for Complaints by virtue of Article 146 of The Housing (NI) Order 2003. As a result of this Registered Housing Associations were designated as public authorities for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Housing associations are regulated by the Department for Social Development (DSD). They work closely with the DSD and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive NIHE to deliver housing and related services. Some also provide care and /or support services so they work with the relevant public authorities for the health sector too. As a result of this situation, housing associations must adhere to a wide range of policies and procedures which have been developed and are owned by a public authority or government department. In such cases

associations must operate the policy of another body and have little or no scope to change that policy. For example, housing associations are the main delivery vehicle for the Social Housing Development Programme but need is determined by the NIHE and the Department for Social Housing develops the programme which is then managed by the Housing Executive. So whilst housing associations may bid to deliver part of that programme they have no powers to shape the programme or establish where new social housing should be built.

In undertaking their Audits of Inequalities and establishing their Action Plans housing associations have therefore been mindful of the need to focus on measures where they have greatest ability to effect change. Where appropriate, potential inequalities identified that is outside the remit of the housing associations will be referred to the relevant public body. While each designated housing association has produced its own Equality Scheme they have also agreed to work collectively on this major undertaking. Their representative body the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) is taking a co-ordinating role as part of this collaborative approach to help maximise resources, promote the sharing of best practice and minimise the administrative burden for stakeholder organisations.

## **St Matthews Housing Association Ltd.**

### **Our Vision**

To become a model of excellence for community based housing associations in Northern Ireland

### **Mission Statement**

Quality, affordable local housing

### **Values**

Community

Quality

Reliable

Trust



## Tenant Focus

### Professional

St. Matthews H.A is based in Belfast and currently has 187 homes in management. We provide housing consisting of general family housing, single adult housing and active elderly housing to our residents in Short Strand, Clonard and Poleglass.

The Association is registered with the Department of Social Development – the regulating body from which we receive capital funding for our property development programme. This funding is augmented by private finance to cover the full cost of provision. Our annual revenue funding is obtained from rent and service charges.

The Association has modest but important development aspirations within the Short Strand where we principally operate. There remains the potential for significant development opportunities in the medium to long term albeit the Association is best placed to share in this through strategic partnerships.

## **Public Life Positions**

The public life positions which exist in the Association are Non Executive Director posts.

The Association is aware that there is currently an under representation of disabled people in public life positions.

## **Report on Progress**

We will submit a progress report to the Equality Commission each year on the implementation of this Disability Action Plan. We will also publish it on the website alongside our Annual Report of Progress.

As required by the DDA, the Association will also carry out a five year review of its Plan and submit it to the Equality Commission.

## **Proposed Action Measures**

On the following pages we have outlined the actions we propose to take in coming years along with targets and timescales. We will review and update this Plan on a regular basis, and will continue to engage with key organisations and individuals representing the interests of people with disabilities.

We are committed to monitoring and reviewing our policies, Practices and practices to ensure that we continue to deliver an effective service to people with disabilities.

When working with disabled people we are committed to making the necessary changes in how we conduct our meetings to ensure meaningful participation by all involved.

The Association will recognise and take into account the varying needs of people with different disabilities. St Matthew's Housing Association will also address the needs of people with multiple identities, such as ethnic minority women with disabilities, children and older people with disabilities etc. and will take account of these in the implementation of the action plan.

Outlined below are the action measures which the Association proposes to take until 2018. We will regularly review and develop the Plan, and will identify additional measures throughout the live of the Plan.

- Awareness training for staff on issues around disability
- Provision of disabled adaption's to tenants who have disabilities
- Facilities to provide information and communication in alternative formats
- Review policies to identify and assess any significant issues relating to the two disability duties
- Include disability awareness in staff inductions
- Engage with organisations and disabled people to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in Public life
- Representation at joint consultation events hosted by the Northern Ireland Housing Association

- Review Induction arrangements to ensure new staff with disabilities are aware of internal support available.
- Collaborate on outreach activities with disability groups to raise awareness of public appointments
- Work to increase representation by disabled people on tenant groups as and where appropriate.
- Provide information that is easy to access and understand
- Improve how we engage with people with disabilities
- Where appropriate promote workplace opportunities and placements
- Increase engagement with the disability sector.

## **Timescale for the implementation of the Action Measures**

St Matthew's Housing Association is aware of the need to monitor progress in relation to the implementation of the Disability Action Plan to ensure that the disability duties are being met. An annual review of the plan will go some way towards monitoring and reviewing the Plan. This will help to develop targets and key performance indicators for the next year whilst detailing any significant outcomes relevant to the review period.

Some of the performance indicators may include circulating information to tenants asking for comments in communications sent out by the Association

**APPENDIX 1**

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
Face to Face contact with disabled people on regular basis	Engage people. Community based HA therefore good access to housing service and offices. Home visits, interpreter services etc.	CEx	Immediate and On-going
Improve access and communication for disabled people	Current office old but accessible. Planning newly built office in next 2/3 years – fully DDA compliant facility – including text phone, induction loop and level access  Based locally and home visits can be arranged and conducted at short notice – on-going  Ensure public events and meetings are held in fully accessible locations  Fully functioning website updated annually and annual report/annual newsletter – promoting articles by disabled and positive imagery	CEx	On-going and July 2018

<p>When hosting internal or external events ensure that :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation and promotion materials are easily readable</li> <li>- Signage is clear</li> <li>- Handouts are in accessible formats</li> <li>- Venues are easy to reach and are accessible</li> <li>- Delegates are made aware of fire evacuation policies and location of toilets</li> <li>- Venues are chosen to ensure that they are welcoming environments.</li> </ul>	<p>If required, ensure all literature is offered in different formats.</p> <p>When hosting events, ensure that facilities meet the needs of all attendees.</p> <p>Encourage tenants with disabilities, who wish to attend events, to inform the Association of their specific needs and requirements, to promote engagement</p>	CEx	On-going
<p>Ensure customer satisfaction surveys carried out allow review of issues affecting people with disabilities</p>	<p>All maintenance related surveys including post-work surveys and new housing post project evaluation surveys - target post-inspections</p> <p>Comprehensive biennial full survey of all residents identifying those with disabilities</p>	CEx	On-going
<p>Positive engagement with other housing associations and NIFHA</p>	<p>Attend all NIFHA training, awareness and informative events pertaining to disabilities</p> <p>Work closely with other colleagues and share information and best practice</p>	CEx	Annually review – July 2016

	<p>within the sector</p> <p>Seek NIFHA statistical analysis and NICORE information on areas where performance in relation to the disabled can be improved</p>		
Positive engagement with specialist disability organisations externally	Establish and formalise links with Disability Action/Phab etc. – utilise work of NIFHA in this area	CEx	Annually review - July 2016
Ensure complaint mechanisms are of sufficient quality for staff and service users	Keep policy under review, internal audit testing of process and annual reporting of complaints received	CEx	Annually review - July 2016 and on-going
Consult and engage staff on how we deal with disability vis-a- vis service users and staff	<p>Through training and awareness events, via annual development appraisal process and via workplace policy.</p> <p>Ensure staff have all resources to deal with those with disabilities effectively</p> <p>Develop protocols and guidance for staff dealing with customers with disabilities and with their support workers and interpreters</p>	CEx	On-going and July 2016

Advice on disabled tenants on changes in welfare reform and new legislation	Ensure disabled tenants have easy access to partner organisations who provide advice and support (i.e. Tenant Debt Advice Service, North Belfast Advice Partnership, etc.)	CEx	On-going
Consult with staff and Board on content of DAP	Make document available to all for review and consultation	CEx	Current
Establish best practice in the recruitment and employment of disabled people	<p>Use disability networks to circulate adverts for employment vacancies to ensure recruitment advertising reaches a wide audience.</p> <p>Establish partnerships to ensure access to good advice and guidance on all employment issues concerning disabled people.</p>	CEx	On-going
Promote Board membership	Identify any under representation in board recruitment advertising – contacting appropriate agencies	CEx	July 2016