



# Inclusive Communities

A guide for Local Authorities



This Guidance was written by Marie Pye and Liz Sayce, with the support of an Advisory Group who gave invaluable input:

Paul Bristow, formerly of Mental Health Foundation

Sam Callanan, Mencap

Neil Cleeveley, National Association for Voluntary and Community Action

Abigail Gallop, Local Government Association

Helen Kay, Local Government Association

Cam Nicholl, Digital Accessibility Centre

William Snagge, Essex Coalition of Disabled People

David Towell, Centre for Inclusive Futures

Graeme Whippy, Lloyds Banking Group

Gerry Zarb, Spectrum Centre for Independent Living

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[www.disabilityrightsuk.org/policy-campaigns/reports-and-research/inclusive-communities](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/policy-campaigns/reports-and-research/inclusive-communities)

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## Introduction

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At the heart of any inclusive community is the active engagement of its citizens. One in five of the UK population lives with a disability or long term health condition, i.e. is a disabled person under the Equality Act 2010.

Disability Rights UK has recently undertaken research (<http://tinyurl.com/mn6rov5>) which shows that inclusive local communities, with strong social networks bring rewards for the whole community: strong political institutions, improved economic development, improved health and more effective public services.

Historically, both in the UK and internationally, disabled people have had limited engagement and participation but that participation is essential to make communities inclusive.

If local authorities work with Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and other partners to support new approaches to participation, there are benefits for everyone. It is about making human rights real for everyone, every day.

Participation by disabled people in development and decision-making is vital – from seeking feedback through to full decision-making and leadership by disabled people. To achieve fully inclusive outcomes (i.e. disabled people taking part in society) requires fully inclusive processes (i.e. disabled people participating at all stages in planning and decision-making). These approaches can also help local authorities meet their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This guide points to opportunities to develop more inclusive communities and provides examples of how it has been done, so we learn from each other's ideas and experiences. We heard about numerous examples of specific work to create inclusion, for instance:

- Dementia Friendly Communities – involving people with early dementia as champions, and bringing together companies, public services and local people to make it easier for people with dementia to go out and participate fully.  
<http://tinyurl.com/nfpfs8z>
- Disability Voice in Swansea, enabling disabled people to have a voice working alongside local decision-makers.
- Community Futures Kent working with Kent libraries District Councils, Police Independent Advisory Group, leisure centres, National Trust and many more to create welcoming attitudes, easy read information and greater access to premises.

- Disability Wales co-developing with the Welsh Government a framework for action on independent living, committing to action across government to forge an inclusive and enabling society.

We also heard of individuals and groups creating inclusion:

- NDTi's programme of developing Community Inclusion mentors which supports disabled and older people to engage in and contribute to their communities, and helps staff and organisations to understand how to build and support real inclusion.  
<http://tinyurl.com/kkmc7pw>
- Disabled People's Organisations and family networks who have worked for fully inclusive public education, as in the London Borough of Newham. When disabled and non-disabled children learn together this can model inclusion from the youngest age and positively influence everyone's attitudes and expectations.

- Leaders who have introduced BSL (British Sign Language) signed services in a Mosque; and an organisation – Livability – working with churches to make them more inclusive. <http://www.livability.org.uk/church/churches/>
- A Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) - Disability Direct in Derbyshire - opening up opportunities to go to music festivals, by making them more inclusive.

More detailed examples are included in our guide for DPOs at <http://tinyurl.com/mn6rov5>. And of course, disabled people as citizens bring the same range of interests as other citizens, for example, in protecting the environment and local biodiversity, ensuring good relationships within the diverse communities in modern Britain, and tackling injustice, and need to be equal contributors to progress on these agenda.

There is a certain amount that individuals and small organisations can achieve; but to make local communities truly inclusive requires systemic joint work between disabled people, the local authority and other partners. (See David Towell's article 'Building a Better Future through Civic Partnership' for further analysis. <http://tinyurl.com/l54rcy4>)



## Local Authorities and inclusive communities

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“In an era of difficult choices, councils need to ensure that people are involved in the decisions affecting them whilst also harnessing their local knowledge and insight to innovate.” (Local Government Information Unit, 2014.)

The participation of disabled people can support core objectives such as health and well-being, economic development, growth and skills, and environmental protection. With the pivotal role of Health & Well-Being Boards and Local Enterprise Partnerships there are significant opportunities for ensuring participation of disabled people supports improved outcomes. These are key areas for local authorities with such a central role in economic growth and new responsibilities in public health.

Local government is a central element of every local community. With its partners it plays a key leadership role, a crucial role in economic growth and can make a tangible, lasting difference to people's lives. Local government is unique in delivering such a wide range of local services from a framework governed by a democratic process in which every adult has the opportunity to participate. Councils are often the single most important source of practical advice to local communities, actively involving people in the design and delivery of their local services.

This is why local authorities are so important to the development of inclusive communities. However, inclusive communities are also important to local government. Delivering services, supporting economic growth and making decisions in tough economic times is difficult.

Ensuring that local communities remain cohesive, with fair and effective service delivery is even tougher. Operating in an environment where communities are inclusive supports that essential cohesion, helps with fair and effective service delivery and provides a positive environment for economic growth.

Confident Commissioning (SENDPO 2014) describes a strategic partnership between Spectrum (a DPO in Hampshire) and the local council and has examples of user-led commissioning.

<http://tinyurl.com/mvwo7ac>





Participation of disabled people leads to changes in action and outcomes:

### **Reporting hate crime**

In Lancashire, joint work by Disabled People's Organisations and agencies including the police and Crown Prosecution Service has led to increased confidence amongst disabled people to report hate crimes and harassment. Disability groups worked together with multiple agencies to set up third party reporting sites i.e. safe spaces for disabled people to report harassment and hate crime, coupled with training for 3000 front-line police officers to respond to crimes as 'hate crimes'. Under section 146 of the Criminal Justice Act sentencing can be tougher if a hate crime motive is established. This collaboration between Disabled People's Organisations and statutory agencies has led to a significant increase in reporting in Lancashire: from 64 reports of disability hate crime in 2012-13 to 172 in 2013-14. Stephen Brookes, Co-ordinator of the Disability Hate Crime Network, and directly involved in the training and third party reporting developments, observes that the keys to success are a multi-agency approach and peer to peer reporting, where disabled people are trained as volunteers in Disabled People's Organisations to take reports on hate crime. Stephen comments that with third party reporting centres "you get disabled people talking to disabled people, the reports work and the police are involved so you get an increase in confidence and reports are taken seriously." The Disability Hate Crime Network set up an accessible website to share good and bad practice, and outcomes relating to disability hate crime nationally. Disability Rights UK has produced guidance on how to set up third party reporting centres through a multi-agency approach.

<http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/publications/lets-stop-disability-hate-crime-guidance>

In Gloucestershire, in 2012, the Police Authority was interested in getting the views of seldom heard groups on policing in their communities and was unsure about how to best reach and engage with those groups. Local infrastructure organisation and NAVCA member Gloucestershire Association for Community and Voluntary Action (GAVCA) was able to organise 15 focus groups from a large variety of community groups including groups for disabled people. Each community group led the focus group involving its members and detailed notes were used to develop a report to inform the in-coming Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Gloucestershire.

The Police and Crime Commissioner's Office has continued to prioritise community engagement and addressing the needs of disabled people in its work by asking the CEO of GAVCA to lead on the priority theme within the Police and Crime Plan which aims to ensure that older and disabled people feel safe and able to be part of their local communities. Through this work, disabled people are able to inform policy while highlighting issues such as the low level of reporting of hate crime from disabled communities and the practical barriers to attending meetings in a rural area, which has led to the PCC providing funding for representatives of disabled groups to attend meetings.

The Gloucestershire Police and Crime Commissioner has relied upon GAVCA to coordinate research to identify the needs of seldom heard groups. Commissioner Martin Surl's office said:

"The PCC really appreciates the support provided by GAVCA in coordinating research associated with the commissioning of Victim Services and, in particular, identifying the needs of the seldom heard groups. Without the support of GAVCA it would have been difficult to engage with these groups whose feedback is critical in developing a specification for the Victim Services commissioning work that will commence in 2014."

## **The participation of disabled people and inclusive communities**

Disabled people need to move from being recipients of services to influencers and decision-makers. There has been much discussion in recent years of ‘shifting the balance of power’, ‘choice and control’ and increased power of the citizen – including the disabled citizen. But the experience on the ground is that power imbalances often remain. For example, often there will be good engagement with parents and carers of disabled children but little with young people themselves.

All main political parties acknowledge the importance of listening to and involving disabled people.

“We want policy to reflect the real-world experiences of citizens, and harness public engagement with the policy-making process. We are therefore seeking to strengthen and broaden input to policy and strategy development from the lived experience of disabled people, and also from people with particular expertise on disability issues in accordance with the principles of open policy-making.” (Mike Penning, former Minister of State for Disabled People)

“Engaging disabled people directly in the design and review of the policies that affect them, and devolving decision-making to local level, will ensure disabled people take a central role in the management of their own lives.” (Kate Green, Shadow Minister for Disabled People, 2014)

Once disabled people are actively participating, including in governance, then practical work can flow to make inclusion a reality. Improvements to the built environment, accessible transport, ensuring disabled people have control over their lives to achieve independence or even tackling hate crime will only be truly successful with the active participation of disabled people.

Disabled people bring a broad range of knowledge, skills, expertise and information which public bodies working for inclusion will find invaluable. This knowledge is not just about disability related services but can inform and improve the inclusive nature of environments, services and communities for everyone. This ensures developments are informed by the expertise of the people who understand disability equality and inclusion best – disabled people, across the spectrum of experiences of living with a disability or long-term health condition.

Through participation disabled people realise their rights to social, economic and political citizenship.



## From engagement to scrutiny

Putting the participation of disabled people at the heart of building inclusive communities needs to be done well to be effective. Our research and review of evidence and practice identified different levels of participation:

- Engagement to seek feedback.
- Focused participation.
- Wider participation and decision-making.
- Being at the heart of governance.

This is important in relation to all citizens, but has particular significance to disabled people who are seldom heard but crucial to the creation of inclusive communities.

Disabled people are not a discrete, homogeneous group. They may move in and out of disability. We are living in an era of 'superdiversity' – living in families of multiple faith or none, of multiple ethnicity, gay as well as straight, with (quite often) more than one family member directly affected by disability. And

as the older population grows, more and more people are living with one or more impairments: it is part of life. The number of people with three or more impairments is set to rise by a third by 2018 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013).

There is no one way to engage with disabled people and no blueprint for ensuring disabled people participate. Decisions are made in lots of different ways in different contexts, so involvement in decision-making will also need to vary. Ground work will need to be done to facilitate this engagement / participation / decision-making and to ensure its effectiveness.

What really matters is that the process fully includes disabled people, is accessible, effective and leads to increased inclusion within local communities and more inclusive outcomes. Many local authorities will already have a relationship with local voluntary sector organisations, charities and Disabled People's Organisations.

These relationships vary and in some areas they may be less than effective. Establishing a more formal relationship with Disabled People's Organisations in particular can bring significant benefits and support a firm structure for ensuring the participation of disabled people.

### **Engaging to get feedback**

Public bodies including local authorities have a long history of engaging with residents and service users, including disabled people, to get feedback on existing services. Many have officers and even teams dedicated to obtaining feedback, engaging with residents and gauging resident satisfaction.

The benefits of this have been widely documented in terms of understanding from a user perspective the experience of a service and assessing resident satisfaction with the local authority performance. In some public sector organisations lower satisfaction levels amongst disabled people have been identified, and improved engagement can help to identify the reasons for this.

Radar (now Disability Rights UK) produced a substantial guide in 2009 for public bodies on engaging with disabled people: Lights Camera Action <http://tinyurl.com/l34vy59>. Whilst the law has changed slightly (from the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 to the Equality Act 2010) the examples and methods remain highly relevant. The guide provides very practical information for local authorities on engaging with disabled people to achieve impact and greater equality.



## **London Borough Hounslow**

Hounslow Council and their partners wanted to review local eye health and sight loss support services. They wanted to know what was working, what wasn't, and what additional services were needed in the borough. Over 80 residents braved gale force storms to attend an event that provided valuable input to identifying how health, social care, transport, employers, ophthalmologists, optometrist and eye surgeons can improve services and address gaps.

The Council led the partnership, with the help of the Thomas Pocklington Trust, a national charity, Ashford and St Peters Hospital, GPs, Public Health, Hounslow Clinical Commissioning Group and third sector organisations, to develop and agree an action plan from the public's feedback. The Action Plan will be presented to the Health and Well-being board and the Council's Cabinet for sign off as priorities for all the respective organisations.

Every resident who attended or was interested in the event got a copy of the action plan based on their feedback and the organisations' commitment to address the issues raised by them. A Vision Strategy group consisting of blind and partially sighted users will monitor the action plan and report progress to residents through the Disability Community Forum. This engagement has resulted in the council building a lasting relationship of trust and bonds with disabled residents. It also strengthened their partnership with health care colleagues.

This will often be part of a local authority's mainstream engagement with residents and is the first level of interaction with disabled people, often being reactive with disabled people commenting on specific proposals. This should not be undervalued as it will help to make local services and communities more inclusive. Most importantly, engagement forms the initial building blocks for further participation.

Local authorities may wish to:

- Review their current engagement to consider the level of participation by disabled people.
- Ensure that engagement which is focused on resident satisfaction with local authority services is reaching disabled people, and understand the reasons behind any low satisfaction levels.
- Look at their engagement mechanisms to make sure these are fully accessible for disabled people.
- Consider more innovative ways to engage with disabled people, possibly by working with local Disabled People's

Organisations to identify them.

### **Focused participation**

Many local authorities have moved on from basic engagement and requests for feedback to understanding the benefits of residents participating in service design, delivery and, in some cases, strategic policy development. This has been particularly true of work with disabled people and disability organisations. The significant benefits of advice and participation by disabled people on specific issues are acknowledged by effective local authorities. Disabled People's Organisations can be helpful because of their knowledge, links to the local community of disabled people, and their independence.

Many local authorities acknowledge that pro-active, clearly focused, well resourced participation, leading to specific outcomes, is the foundation of more effective services that help make communities more inclusive. Having the service user, or simply those with personal and significant expertise in relation to disability, involved in service design or specific advice



puts inclusion at the heart of the service.

In some local authorities this participation is long-standing and relates to issues which have a well-documented impact on disabled people – such as the built environment and local transport plans. Whilst these issues may be seen as the “traditional” areas for participation of disabled people, this does not reduce their importance – a fact acknowledged by government, who have identified both built environment and transport as key issues for inclusive communities.

Under equality legislation, local authorities are obliged to pay due regard to equality in key decision-making. This public sector equality duty is regarded as a strong element of good decision-making and when not undertaken effectively has been the subject of a number of legal cases. The early participation of disabled people in considering the equality impact of key decisions can bring real benefits: ensuring that ‘due regard’ is effectively paid, and bringing effective outcomes including improved decision-making and more inclusive communities.



### **City of London**

The City of London Access Team works closely with disabled people on issues relating to the Square Mile, including design principles to ensure that buildings and the external environment meet the access needs of disabled people. They take a leading role in legislation, publications and events that affect disabled people. They work closely with the City of London Access Group (CoLAG) most of whose members have a disability and live or work in, or regularly visit, the City. Ranging from when physical access improvements are under consideration through to public transport issues, the input of CoLAG members is keenly sought and their opinions have influenced some major initiatives. Views of the Access group are also requested when consultative documents present themselves, emanating from local policies, central Government or such bodies as Transport for London.

The Access Team enjoys close professional working relationships with members of CoLAG and facilitates the Group's bi-monthly meetings in suitable and accessible meeting rooms at the Guildhall. In addition to the 'main' meetings, the Access Team professionals will often arrange a sub-group meeting to discuss a major planning application or transport issue, as well as inviting members to accompany them when touring the City's construction sites as part of the Considerate Contractors Scheme Access Awards ceremony.

### **Disability First in Blackpool**

A Disabled People's Organisation which convenes the local disability partnership, involving the local authority, transport, education, police and others. Working together they have pioneered more accessible transport, for instance, a 'journey card' enabling disabled people to communicate their access needs easily to bus or tram drivers. They have also undertaken focused work on community safety issues.

Rugby Borough Council is a licensing authority for taxis. Their main responsibility is to ensure that people who travel by taxi are safe, and so the responsibility includes the safety of vehicles, drivers and passengers. As part of this process they organise and attend the Rugby Taxi Forum which includes council officers, representatives of the taxi trade, representatives from the local disability group, Rugby Disability Forum (RDF) and the police.

Part of this responsibility is to ensure the supply and suitability of wheelchair accessible taxis.

There is no official government approved vehicle which meets the needs of disabled people. Most suppliers meet a basic specification drafted by Loughborough University for manual wheelchairs. The taxi trade argue that not all taxis should be wheelchair accessible as the expense is considerable and demand was considered to be low.

A policy review was required which met the needs of disabled people, especially those with wheelchairs, and also considered the economic needs of the taxi trade. As key partners the Council asked the Rugby Disability Forum, the taxi trade and taxi manufacturers for their views and took them into consideration in the decision making process.

Rugby Disability Forum asked its members about what type of vehicles they wanted, for example, saloon, and fully wheelchair accessible.

A collective decision was made that the best way to determine if a vehicle was wheelchair accessible was to invite suppliers to bring wheelchair accessible taxis and for them to be practically assessed by members of the Rugby Disability Forum, with officers from the Council and representatives of the taxi trade also present

It was also decided that instead of the generally accepted standard of access with a manual NHS wheelchair, that accessibility should be determined using a small electric wheelchair as that is more commonly used. This found that a number of taxis that claimed to be wheelchair accessible were not easy to access, and in some cases members of RDF felt it was unsafe e.g. high angle ramps.

Based on this, and after formal consultation, a policy was adopted with a list of vehicles the Council considered to be wheelchair accessible. RDF are also involved in determining if any new vehicles should be considered wheelchair accessible, including a practical assessment if they feel it is required.

The Council have identified that the lessons from this are:

- The importance of asking customers what they need rather than making assumptions or relying on accepted practice or guidance.
- The need for detailed background information gathering.
- The importance of involving specialist groups with specialist knowledge of equality and diversity issues and the ability to identify when that is needed and which groups to engage.
- The need to make difficult decisions when trying to meet the needs of a wide variety of interested parties with often conflicting priorities and economic pressures.
- The importance of partnership working.

Local authorities may wish to:

- Consider areas where disabled people make up a significant percentage of service users and consider what mechanisms could be put in place to increase their feedback on services and, crucially, their participation in and advice on future plans. Ensure that participation mechanisms are clearly focused on disabled people and not just on carers or family members, for example in relation to services for disabled children.
- Identify other key areas where the participation of disabled people may bring specific and helpful advice.
- Look at putting in place formal advisory groups or mechanisms to ensure the consistent participation of disabled people and effective advice.
- Identify specific roles for local Disabled People's Organisations and consider what commissioning arrangements could be put in place.

### **Wider participation and decision-making**

Whilst the participation of disabled people on issues with a clear 'disability impact' is of tremendous value, there can be even more value in participation on wider issues, often in a very structured way that has a specific impact on decisions.

Many local authorities facilitate the participation of disabled people in wider decision-making. This recognises that any development (not only those 'obviously' of significance to disabled people) will work best if it works for everyone, and that disabled people are diverse and multifaceted, experience barriers in a variety of ways and can make a valuable contribution by looking at the full spectrum of local authority activities. This is one of the most effective ways of building inclusion into local services and also promoting social, economic and civil citizenship.

The key to effectiveness is not making assumptions about the areas of local authority policy development or services where disabled people can add value. It may not be obvious to an Environment Department that talking to local disabled people about how to improve waste collection would be beneficial. In fact some local authorities who have done this have discovered that removing some of the barriers experienced by disabled people to recycling and refuse services benefit the whole population.



This approach, more than all others, is likely to lead to more inclusive communities because it cuts across all the key areas and ensures that disabled people are at the heart of decisions.

Each local authority would need to develop their own model of involving disabled people in decision-making. This may centre on partnerships with local Disabled People's Organisations, formal arrangements within the council's decision-making structure, or development of specific structures for disabled people to participate and make recommendations.

## **London Borough of Hounslow**

London Borough of Hounslow set up a Disability Community Forum (DCF) to act as a vehicle for local disabled residents to register their concerns on issues which impact on the quality of their lives. The forum also assists, advises and supports the Council to meet the general and specific duties arising from the Equality Act 2010.

The forum is a sub-committee of the Cabinet and has a membership which includes councillors and 5 user representatives from the community and voluntary organisations operating within the Borough.

This structure increases access to democratic participation for disabled residents in council functions and services. Representation from all the parties also means ownership and commitment to disability equality from all political parties. It also provides the committee with clout and ensures officers attend and act on promises made to the community.

As an advisory body the DCF advises and make recommendations to the Cabinet and refers matters to other relevant council bodies, as appropriate. There are four meetings per year. Special focus groups are set up between meetings to consult and engage local disabled residents on key changes the council is proposing: for instance, changes to web page design, customer access to Hounslow council, and town centre regeneration.

### **Transport for London Independent Disability Advisory Group (IDAG)**

Serious moves have been taken in London to make transport more accessible – from creating the largest fleet of accessible buses in the world to some operating companies, like Docklands Light Railway, offering disabled people a test journey with someone to show them the route, to try a whole journey and make sure it's feasible. These developments would not have happened without the participation of disabled people.

Transport for London has developed IDAG, which is an independent group whose members are recruited on a formal basis for their expertise in relation to disability equality. They are all disabled people.

The remit of the group is across Transport for London, and agendas and work programmes are set by the group members themselves.

The independent structure of IDAG is one of the first of its kind in a transport organisation – Transport for London take the view that this is about putting into practice the principle of involving disabled people in all services.

### **London Borough of Sutton**

The London Borough of Sutton's Equality and Diversity Forum is a formal advisory mechanism of the Council that includes representatives from the Borough's equality and diversity groups, such as Sutton Centre for Independent Learning and Living (SCILL), Sutton Vision, and the Smart Enterprise. The Forum meets up to four times a year and is chaired by Councillor Adrian Davey.

The Forum provides advice to the Council, its committees, officers of the Council and to other public service providers on equality and diversity issues. Recently, the Forum has considered issues such as Sutton Station Redevelopment and disability access, and developed a programme of equality and diversity events. <http://tinyurl.com/mvaengm>



Local authorities may wish to:

- Review what formal mechanisms they already have in place for disabled people to participate in decision-making or offer advice in an official setting.
- Look at the role which is being played by disabled people in the production of equality impact assessments or assessing the equality impact of key decisions.
- Consider whether they wish to establish a formal advisory group of disabled people and what their role would need to be to ensure effective outcomes.
- Produce, in conjunction with disabled people, a participation plan involving a range of mechanisms and activities to increase the participation and influence of disabled people.
- Review their committee structure to identify whether there are increased opportunities for participation by disabled people.
- Identify what the most effective role could be for local Organisations of Disabled People in supporting these activities and consider what this would mean in relation to commissioning.

### The role for scrutiny

There is a clear role for disabled people to participate within the scrutiny function of local authorities particularly within the structures in place in England & Wales.

“Public scrutiny is now moving into another era with community-led scrutiny of local decisions. This is where the public’s involvement in challenging local authorities and public service providers on public service improvement and delivery is actively sought by elected representatives...Constructive and ongoing engagement with stakeholders, from experts to the general public, helps to achieve genuine accountability for the use of public resources.” (Centre for Public Scrutiny.)

By hearing from disabled people directly affected by policies and services, scrutiny committees can get an understanding about the experience of using services and obtain a perspective on what disabled people and communities value.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny point out that outcomes from this kind of work can add value to decision-making processes by introducing considerations of ‘value’, not just ‘cost’.

Local authorities may wish to:

- Establish direct relationships with, or commission, local Disabled People's Organisations to advise on scrutiny processes in general or on specific issues under consideration.
- Co-opt disabled people onto scrutiny committees or listen to their views within scrutiny enquiries or panels.
- Carefully scrutinise equality impact assessments associated with specific proposals to ensure that the impact on disabled people is fully considered and their views taken into account.

## London Borough of Hackney

A project by the Scrutiny Committee in Hackney was successful in winning an award from the Centre for Public Scrutiny in 2013. This focused on the take-up of youth services by young disabled people. Rather than spending time in the town hall having meetings, councillors found innovative ways to hear the views of young disabled people first-hand. This included Members attending Hackney's Primary and Secondary Disabled Forums to talk to disabled children and young people to hear about the activities they take part in and the barriers to accessing the services they want. Members also attended two site visits to Hackney Ark, Hackney's Children and Young Person's Centre for Development and Disability and attended an 'Activity for All' event at Britannia Leisure Centre

As a result of that close listening, the committee's recommendations were clear and smart and led to changes such as improved training for staff and outcomes such as a higher take-up of services by young disabled people.



## Key areas for participation

### Economic growth

Too often disabled people have not benefited even when jobs and skills are coming on stream in a local area. Disabled people are left until last – either out of work or stuck in low paid, low skilled, insecure employment.

Many people living with disability or health conditions want decent employment: a real opportunity of a career (not just a job), with equality, and flexibility if needed to accommodate impairment, for instance, being able to work when well if you have a fluctuating condition.

Quite simply, a successful economic recovery is an inclusive recovery. As the Prime Minister put it, “What hope do we have in this global race if we lose out on the skills and talents of one fifth of our population? It would be like competing with one hand tied behind our back. What hope do we have as a country if a fifth of our people are excluded from mainstream society?”

Across England there are 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) championing economic growth, and working with partners to develop skills for employment and create new business opportunities and new jobs. Whilst the development of LEPs has sometimes been a rocky road they are now undoubtedly the main focus and bedrock of local economic development.

We are seeing development and expansion of their work, including LEP formulation of strategic economic plans (SEPs), EU structural and investment fund strategies (SIFs) and the inception of four new Combined Authorities (CAs) for northern ‘city regions’ (Leeds, Liverpool, North East, and Sheffield).

Where local authorities and Disabled People’s Organisations have linked up with this mainstream agenda of economic growth it has sometimes paid dividends.

### **Improving employment**

Hartlepool Local Authority had a team supporting people with learning disabilities or mental health challenges into employment, based in social services. As in most areas, employment rates of these groups were very low. They made a simple change – integrating the team with their economic regeneration department, linking their employment support to individuals to the actual local opportunities for new jobs, using their relationships with businesses to create new opportunities. As a result the employment rate of people with learning disabilities known to social services reached nearly double the national average – still low in absolute terms, but better than many areas.

### **Working with DPO's and the LEP**

ecdP, a Disabled People's Organisation, has engaged with the South East Local Enterprise Partnership with the aim of putting people with lived experience of disability at the centre of local enterprise development. ecdP Works is an award winning peer enabled employment training and work placement programme, delivered in partnership with business and the private sector. ecdP is engaged through the LEP with the Structural and European Union Investment Fund Strategy, with the aim of further building this work.

LEPs may wish to link up with Disabled People's Organisations and other local partners to open up local opportunities for disabled people to:

- Ensure that local Labour Market Intelligence is shared with disability organisations that may be advising people on skills or careers: where are jobs, apprenticeships, traineeships or other opportunities coming up? The database LMI for All provides access to data on this to help inform career decisions – see <http://www.lmiforall.org.uk/>
- Share available stories from disabled people who are working, or pursuing apprenticeships – driving up expectations about what disabled people can achieve. For instance, see 'Into Apprenticeships' at <http://tinyurl.com/lxrw3xn>
- Explore partnership opportunities. A Disabled People's Organisation or other disability organisation may be able to support local employers to retain or recruit and/or support individuals to keep or secure jobs, apprenticeships, traineeships, new enterprises, or gain new skills or qualifications.
- Support peer support and peer mentoring. There is nothing quite so powerful when out of work and lacking confidence as learning from someone who has travelled the same path before you.

## Personalised Employment Support

Manchester-based DPO Breakthrough UK offers personalised employment support on people's own terms 'we'll work with you, not make decisions for you'. Support is designed around the clients' own employment goals and individual needs and is delivered by other disabled people who have lived experience of the barriers of prejudice, environment and lack of support. Policy and practice is based on the social model of disability and clients learn to understand how barriers can be removed to enable them to work in any role or workplace. Breakthrough UK also hosts a 'Talent Match' Coach to work specifically with young disabled people who are NEET ('Not in Employment, Education or Training') and support them to achieve their employment goals, enabling them to access apprenticeships, vocational training, work experience and volunteering on their journey to employment.

## Health & Well-Being Boards

The new focus on increased responsibility for public health brings new opportunities to make communities more inclusive by increasing the participation of disabled people.

In England, every local authority area has set up a Health and Well-Being Board, a partnership of clinical and local authority leaders, with Healthwatch (consumer champion) involvement, overseeing local work to set priorities for commissioning health and social care and improving the health and well-being of the whole local community. Each Health and Well-Being Board identifies top priority issues – for instance, improving the health of those with poorest health, active participation in the community, overcoming isolation, improving access to fitness and good health.

Organisations led by people with lived experience of disability or long term health conditions can, and often do, promote social networks and mobilise the power of community and peer support, overcoming isolation, enabling disabled people (who often experience inadequate health care) to achieve better health and opportunities, influencing local health provision.

According to the Kings Fund, the success of Health and Well-Being Boards will rest not on their formal meetings, but on how they relate to people using services and the public (see Richard Humphries, 2014 at <http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2013/03/how-are-health-and-wellbeing-boards-shaping-their-new-responsibilities>). Local Disabled People's Organisations are in a position to help local authorities and their partners to make that happen.

### **Mental Healthwatch**

National Survivor User Network (NSUN) led by people living with mental health challenges, recognised that when people with lived experience are properly involved in shaping their services and communities they live in, their own health and the support available usually improves. NSUN therefore designed the Mental Healthwatch scheme – supporting people with lived experience to get involved with Healthwatch, the health and social care consumer champion, involved in everything from being trained to do 'enter and view' visits to local services, to advising on service improvements. By 2014, 150 volunteers and 50 local Healthwatches had got involved in the programme

(NSUN 2014 Mental Healthwatch Handbook: improving mental health with your community. <http://tinyurl.com/l3jy7n8>)



In Scotland a series of pop-up think tanks have focused on independent living 'solutions' that make recommendations for seizing the opportunity of integration of health and social care, always linking independent living to human rights.

<http://www.ilis.co.uk/independent-living-policy/new-policy-entry>

Local authorities may wish to approach a local Disabled People's Organisation to explore how users of local services can best feed into priority setting – both strategically (thinking jointly about the best methods for engagement) and practically (for example, commissioning a DPO to undertake engagement exercises, focus groups, surveys etc) – since Disabled People's Organisations are often well placed to reach under-served groups, and already have their trust).

## Disabled people at the heart of governance

Engagement and participation are of immense value in ensuring that services and decision-making foster inclusive communities. However, the ultimate role in decision-making within local areas is through the ballot box and standing for election. A truly inclusive community is one which has maximum participation by disabled people in democratic processes and is successful in ensuring that disabled people are represented within governance structures.

Some of the barriers to participating in elections for disabled people are cultural or relate to the nature of political engagement – for instance, it is only recently that some elected officials have begun to feel safe to be open about hidden impairments like mental health issues – whilst others may be practical or physical.

Work undertaken by the charity Scope during the 2010 election identified that there were accessibility barriers at 67% of

polling stations surveyed. That's an improvement of only 1% on the previous general election and just 2% on the election before. 47% people who told them about their postal voting experience reported accessibility issues. In some ways, things had got worse: in 2005 70% of polling stations had large ballot papers on display, but this dropped to only 49% in 2010. Disabled People's Organisations will clearly have expertise to advise local authorities on improving access.

Local authorities have a role in promoting voting and this goes beyond removing physical barriers and improving accessibility. Consideration of the cultural context for some disabled people may help to tailor communications to increase the understanding of the relevance of democratic participation. This could range from highlighting the role that elected members have in relation to key services for disabled people through to highlighting the history of disabled people who

were denied the right to vote, or positive stories about disabled people who have been involved in local politics. Again there may be a clear role for local Disabled People's Organisations in supporting this work.

Whilst democratic participation is a cornerstone of an inclusive community, a further indicator is the number of disabled people who seek to become elected representatives. Disabled people are actually identified as better represented as local councillors than in some other professional roles: the annual survey undertaken each year normally records in the region of 10% reporting experience of disability. However, it is widely felt that this is related to the fact that the average age of councillors is much older than the general population. The representation of young disabled people amongst councillors is very low. Also the rate has been higher than 10% but has dropped in most recent years.

If more and more disabled people do become local councillors and non-executives, we might see a change in the conversation: away from seeing disabled people as a 'vulnerable' minority – and towards recognising that disability and health conditions are an ordinary part of human experience, which affects virtually every family, and absolutely every community.

Through that lens, it simply makes sense to make all decisions inclusive decisions. Whether it is a planning decision on a new housing development, or a public engagement exercise on crime prevention, it will simply be more effective if inclusion is considered from the beginning. And disabled people's involvement in decisions is the simplest way of making sure that happens.

Whilst neither government nor local authorities can or should influence the selection of candidates by political parties, or decisions about who stands in elections, they do have a clear role in supporting and encouraging disabled people to consider this option and removing any specific barriers. Additionally local authorities have a strong role in promoting the work which is being undertaken by government and by other organisations such as the Local Government Association.

### **Access to elected office fund**

The access to elected office for disabled people fund was set up by government in 2012 to run until March 2015. The fund offers individual grants of between £250 and £40,000 to disabled people who want to be considered for selection as candidates for an election, or are planning to stand for election.

The fund will cover certain costs that a disabled person who wants to stand for elected office will have to pay, to help fund the additional support that they may need when trying to get elected. Without this support, a disabled person may face an extra barrier that a non-disabled person would not face.

The fund covers the following types of costs:

- transport-related costs (for example, the cost of using private taxis if you cannot use public transport or drive, or extra parking charges if you have limited mobility).
- support-related costs (for example, the cost of extra train tickets or another hotel room for your personal assistant).
- communication-related costs (for example, a British Sign Language interpreter).
- technology-related costs (for example, a screen reader or voice-recognition programme).

## Be a Councillor campaign

The Local Government Association has a long-standing Be A Councillor campaign which recognises that local government is only as vibrant, effective and relevant as the people elected to run it. The campaign works to increase the talent pool from which councillors are elected and ensure councils better represent their electorate. There is guidance available for people considering becoming a councillor – including a specific document for disabled people <http://tinyurl.com/ouw9yse> – as well as guidance for those talent spotting and recruiting candidates for election (see <http://tinyurl.com/kavebaa>). Councils, regional organisations and local parties are encouraged to support the Be a Councillor campaign by running a local version tailored to their particular area.

The LGA is also working with the Government Equalities Office on a pilot programme to encourage more disabled people to consider becoming a councillor. Potential candidates will be mentored by councillors and political experts.

## Self advocacy

In Bracknell Forest a series of successful visits were held in the spring with Be Heard, a self-advocacy group for adults with learning difficulties. These short democracy awareness workshops covered how to vote at the local elections in May 2011. A further session was held in October to give participants a chance to give feedback on their voting experience and meet some of the newly elected councillors.

## The voting experience

A discussion was held on whether members of the Group had voted during the election in May and, if yes, how they felt the experience had been.

Eight members of the group had voted and felt that the experience was easier than it had been in the past as they were more aware of the process. Members of the group were pleased that they had been able to vote on their own and have their say on who they wanted to be elected.

Suggestions on how to make the voting process easier in the future included pictorial ballot papers for those who were not able to read.

Of those members who did not vote, some had actively chosen not to as they felt that in the past councillors had not responded to their queries and had ignored requests for help. Some members of the group felt that the Council did not help them and therefore there was no point in voting.

### **Meeting new councillors**

Two Councillors attended the event and spoke to members of Be Heard about their new role and what the Council did to help people in the Borough. Members of the group were also given the opportunity to ask the Councillors questions on issues important to them such as the town centre regeneration and community safety. Members were given the opportunity to find out who their ward councillor was and how to contact them.

Local authorities may wish to:

- Identify the voting levels of disabled people within the area. This may require specific research.
- Work with disabled people to identify barriers to voting and ways to remove these.
- Identify ways to specifically promote voting and political participation to disabled people.
- Promote schemes such as the access fund and Be a Councillor campaign locally.
- Consider commissioning local Disabled People's Organisations to undertake or support this work.

## The key role for organisations of disabled people

It is clear from Disability Rights UK's research into Inclusive Local Communities that the active role of disabled people is crucial and that local authorities are central to ensuring that the work is strongly influenced by and at best led by disabled people. This is echoed by the Inter-ministerial Group on Disability whose criteria for accessible communities include disabled people having a say and involving disabled people in service design and delivery.

The challenge for local government, in difficult economic times when efficiency is top of the agenda is how to facilitate this participation of disabled people. The solution in many areas will lie in a close working relationship with local Disabled People's Organisations. These organisations, mainly voluntary in nature and led by disabled people, can be both the experts on disability equality and the conduit to engagement and participation by a wider group of local disabled people.



These organisations can be engaged or commissioned to undertake a wide range of activities to support the role of disabled people in developing inclusive communities:

- Advising at a strategic level on how to engage disabled people across mainstream agendas, like health and well-being, economic growth, civic participation, and environmental protection. This might include strengthening disabled people's involvement in the Health and Well-Being Board or LEP, scrutiny processes, and other existing structures – or establishing new structures for disabled people's engagement in decision-making. It might involve specific engagement mechanisms to work with these structures.
- Engagement of disabled people to support the council in agreeing equality objectives, in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty; and in agreeing where disabled people's participation will add most value overall (from refuse collection to housing).
- Advising on the engagement of disabled people within mainstream engagement activities (from resident surveys to local forums).
- Advising on the engagement of disabled people on issues relating specifically to the inclusion of disabled people – and inclusive communities.
- Actually facilitating disabled people's participation in specific projects.
- Facilitating the participation of disabled people more widely in the work the authority is doing, in order to foster an inclusive approach.
- Providing advice on involving disabled people in decision-making and where appropriate organising such involvement.
- Working with the local authority to ensure that disabled people are encouraged and facilitated to participate in voting, and rolling out the Be a Councillor campaign locally.



Whilst organisations of disabled people are mostly based in the voluntary sector they cannot be simply treated as volunteers and would need to be commissioned to undertake this role in a professional capacity and valued for their professional expertise. Some organisations may not be well versed in participating in commissioning in the same way that larger or national charities may be and may require some support to undertake this.

In some areas there may not be local Disabled People's Organisations although there may be issue or impairment specific local organisations concerned with disability issues. There may be a role for the local authority in supporting the establishment of a local Disabled People's Organisation led and controlled by disabled people.

Developing this relationship with local organisations of disabled people is likely to be the most effective way of ensuring that work to create inclusive communities is built on solid foundations.

## Local Voices

Local Voices is a project developed by Tower Hamlets Council in conjunction with their local organisation of disabled people - Real. The project is funded by Tower Hamlets Council and run by disabled people. Real facilitates the project on behalf of the Council.

This wide-ranging project provides an opportunity for local disabled people to influence local decisions that affect them and help the Borough deliver better services for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions. There is a network which disabled people can become involved in and regular events and activities to keep people engaged. The project is run by a steering committee made up of people from Tower Hamlets who are disabled or have long-term health conditions.

Throughout the project, disabled people have been forthcoming with ideas on how issues can be resolved. Working in partnership with the council, Local Voices plans to develop a realistic, relevant and flexible action plan that will help build a strong, sustainable model for the ongoing consultation of disabled people in the borough.

Local Voices is in its second year. In the first year, they talked with hundreds of people to find out their main concerns about life with a disability or long-term health condition. This resulted in an extensive report.

A number of issues raised during year 1 have already prompted action in the short term to make life better for disabled residents. Local Voices is now a key member of the council's Welfare Reform Task Group and has instigated a number of council-led improvements to policies, information and support provision, grass roots campaigning and peer support. An easy read booklet has been produced for disabled residents and work has been undertaken with Social Workers and Officers in other front line services on where to sign-post disabled people for information on benefits changes.

Local Voices works with commissioners in adult social care, sitting on commissioning and interview panels to ensure that disabled people are involved in service design and delivery.

Being able to move from place to place is a fundamental element of independence and inclusion. Many disabled people rely on publicly-funded services to make this happen. Roads and pavements were the number one concern for survey respondents in year 1, with transport coming third. Local Voices supported the council to refresh its Accessible Transport Forum. The Forum has representation from a range of transport providers and takes a holistic approach to tackling transport issues for disabled people across Tower Hamlets. Local Voices members are actively involved in working with the council's highways team, assisting them in identifying potential issues around street furniture and pavements. During year 2, the network will work with officers in Highways by undertaking 'accessibility journeys' in various areas of the borough.

Local authorities may wish to:

- Review what current services they are commissioning that local Disabled People's Organisations could also be invited to deliver.
- Identify what activities or actions local Disabled People's Organisations could support them with in relation to engagement and participation of disabled people.
- Support local Disabled People's Organisations who are unfamiliar with commissioning processes to ensure they are able to effectively participate in these.
- Where there is not a specific Disabled People's Organisation in a local area, consider supporting disabled people and specific groups of disabled people working on other issues to establish one.

## Tackling barriers to participation

Traditional and even less traditional methods of engaging with and encouraging participation of residents often present particular barriers for disabled people. Efforts to identify and overcome barriers, working with disabled people, are well-documented. Overcoming barriers often centres on early discussions with disabled people about positive participation, accessible and focused communication, removing physical barriers, providing appropriate adjustments for face-to-face participation and necessary support and resources.

Some Local Authorities have found that simply removing barriers may not necessarily bring disabled people flooding to participate. Disabled people may have a record of low levels of participation. Outreach work, building confidence and making the case for how participation may improve services and make communities more inclusive has been needed. Disabled people may also be local residents who

have a record of low levels of participation. Promoting examples of how previous participation led to better and more inclusive outcomes will be central to this: ‘You said, we did’ – where what ‘we did’ was something more inclusive!

Increasingly service delivery, engagement and participation across local authorities take place electronically, through online services, electronic communication or social media. Some disabled people appreciate this: it is how some younger people expect to participate. It can be helpful, for instance, for people who find face to face contact more challenging (like some people with autism) or who are unable for health reasons to travel. For others it creates huge new barriers, with access issues relating to new technology, costs of accessible technology and unfamiliarity. These methods of participation are likely to continue, particularly with reduced resources available to local authorities.

Some straightforward adjustments can be built into local authority services to improve access: for example, ensuring that accessible technology and adjustments are available for computers and equipment provided for public use in libraries, leisure centres or drop-in shops. This could include ergonomic keyboards and large screens, or the flexibility to provide more bespoke software for regular users in places like libraries.

Many local authorities have gone beyond simply removing the barriers and have worked with disabled and older people to identify issues in using electronic communication and to find ways to encourage their use, maximising the benefits both for individuals and the community more broadly. Being on-line is one important part of social and economic citizenship, offering access to everything from cheaper shopping deals to knowledge and social opportunities.



### **Leicester on line**

CareOnLine is a free service provided by Leicestershire County Council which introduces computers and the Internet to disabled adults and their carers, especially those with no experience or who cannot leave home.

CareOnLine is an outreach service providing a complete package of advice, technical support and training into people's homes, to help overcome fear of technology and encourage learning. Their website provides a wealth of information and advice for the community. Learning to use new technology gives disabled people equal opportunities and the chance to communicate and take part in their local community and more widely, which they might otherwise find extremely difficult.

Just one example is that CareOnLine consulted Blaby District Council and the Tenants Association at Jubilee House Sheltered Housing scheme on whether they would like a computer. Colin Norman, the chairman of the association organised a meeting between CareOnLine and residents to discuss the idea and agree what the residents wanted.

CareOnLine installed a computer in the community lounge and residents were offered training. 14 people aged 65 to 85 attended the first course to begin developing skills in internet use, e-mail and word processing.

Local authorities may wish to:

- Review their current engagement and participation activities to assess the level of activity from disabled people.
- Work with disabled people and/or Disabled People's Organisations to identify specific barriers and ways to remove these.
- Consider positive measures to encourage engagement and participation with disabled people.
- Identify ways to remove barriers and improve online and electronic engagement to ensure that this is fully accessible for disabled people, and introduce specific projects to increase the take-up among disabled people of electronic communication and social media.

## Conclusion

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Inclusive communities benefit everyone: they contribute to the area's health, economic growth, and strength of democratic engagement. They are needed to ensure maximum commitment to tackling the key 21st Century challenges, from climate change to ensuring new models of service to mobilise networks to support people who are living longer. Local authorities are in the central position to foster this inclusion, by working with all citizens and particularly by working with Disabled People's Organisations. This can be done through different levels of participation of disabled people – from consultation on pre-existing plans through to decision making and democratic engagement. The higher the level of participation, the fuller the inclusion is likely to be. It is by public authorities working with disabled people and their organisations that we are likely to see a step change in inclusion.

This is about making human rights real for everyone, every day.