



Co-Ownership
Housing

Northern Ireland Co-Ownership
Housing Association Ltd

Disability Action Plan
April 2007

Drawn up in accordance with the Disability
Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by article 5 of
the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland)
Order 2006)

Co-Ownership Housing
Murray House
Murray Street
Belfast
BT1 6DN



FOREWORD

Section 49A of The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006) requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions, powers and duties, to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons and also encourage participation by disabled persons in public life. Public Authorities, as defined by the legislation, are required to send a Disability Action Plan to the Equality Commission, showing how they intend to carry out their new duties.

As Chair and Chief Executive of **Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association Ltd (Co-Ownership Housing)** we are pleased on behalf of our **Board** and staff to produce a Disability Action Plan which arises out of the implementation of Section 49B The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006). Commitments made in the Disability Plan refer to how **Co-Ownership Housing** carries out all its functions, powers and duties relating to Northern Ireland. **Co-Ownership Housing** is committed to ensuring that all necessary resources (in terms of people, time and money) are made available to support the effective promotion of positive attitudes and participation of disabled persons in all its policies and practices. This also includes making sure there are effective internal arrangements in place to ensure that the duties are effectively complied with and for monitoring and reviewing progress.

Co-Ownership Housing will actively seek to develop a programme of communication and training with the aim of ensuring all staff are made aware and understand the disability duties. The purpose of this Disability Action Plan is to set out how **Co-Ownership Housing** will fulfil the new statutory duties.

Chair

Chief Executive



1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Section 49a of The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires the organisation in carrying out all its functions, powers and duties to have due regard to:
- The need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons;
And
 - The need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life.
- 1.2 Section 49B of the Order requires the organisation to prepare and submit to the Equality Commission a plan showing how Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association Limited proposes to fulfil the duty imposed by Section 49A. This plan has been developed to satisfy that statutory requirement.

2.0 Duties and Responsibilities

The Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association Ltd was established in 1978.

The Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association Limited is registered as a housing association under the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 and also as an industrial and provident society under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts (Northern Ireland) 1969 and 1976.

Co-Ownership Housing is regulated and partly funded by the Department for Social Development and was set up to contribute towards meeting affordable housing need through the promotion and development of the concept of equity sharing (shared ownership) in the housing sector. It achieves this through the Co-Ownership Scheme (“Co-Ownership”).

- 2.1 Its main role is ‘to provide opportunities through equity sharing to those outside the margins of conventional home ownership.’
- 2.2 The Board of Management of **Co-Ownership Housing** membership comprises the Chair and up to 14 other members appointed under the terms set out in the Code of Governance. The Board reflects a range of interests, representing the interests of users of the service.
- 2.3 The functions of **Co-Ownership Housing** for purposes of the Order include its powers and duties. In this Scheme the following are to be regarded as the functions:



Board
Staff
Housing Administration
Finance
Marketing
Consultants/contractors/suppliers

Chief Executive

- 2.4 The Chief Executive is responsible to the Chair and the Board of Management of the organisation for the management of **Co-Ownership Housing** as a corporate body.

Senior Management Team

- 2.5 The **Co-Ownership Housing** Senior Management Team is responsible to the Chief Executive and includes the following officers:

Operations Director/Secretary to the Board
Finance Director
Housing Director.

3.0 Arrangements for assessing achievement of section 49 duties.

Organisational Arrangements

- 3.1 **Co-Ownership Housing** is committed to the fulfilment of its Section 49 obligations in all parts of its work. Statutory responsibility for the effective implementation of the Scheme lies with the Chair of the Board of Management of the organisation and the Chief Executive.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive will be accountable to the Board of Management of **Co-Ownership Housing** for the development, maintenance and review of the Scheme in accordance with the legislation, including any good practice or guidance that may be issued by the Equality Commission.
- 3.3 Responsibility for driving forward implementation of the equality scheme rests with the Chief Executive and the Board of Management and the point of contact within **Co-Ownership Housing** will be:



Name	David McCallum
Title	Operations Director
Address	Murray House Murray Street BELFAST
Tel No	028 90 327276
Text Phone Users	18001 028 90 327276
Fax No	028 90 330720
E-mail	<u>dmccallum@co-ownership.org</u>

- 3.4 He will report regularly to the organisation's Senior Management Team (SMT) and respond to any queries for all those affected by the statutory duties.

If you require the plan in an alternative format please contact the above person to discuss your requirements.



Progress Reporting

3.5 Previous Measures

Access & Communication

Priority: Access to building and internal facilities, effective communications and improved attitudes.

Action	Status
All information to be available in accessible formats.	This is a policy we already have, all material is available in large print, Braille audio cassette or computer disc.
Website to be accessible and easy to read for visually impaired people.	Already have exceeded the standards with 'browse aloud' & WAI level II on our website www.co-ownership.org
Staff will understand how to work with hearing impaired people	Training given by Type Talk Nov 06 to all staff.
Staff to be flexible in arranging interviews in respect of access to the Scheme.	Interviews and meetings are accessible to disabled people.
Co-Ownership offices should be accessible to disabled individuals.	Property adaptations have been taken into consideration with refurbishment in 2001 in line with Section 75.

Recruitment & Selection

Priority: Ensure better employment opportunities for disabled people.

Action	Status
Information on vacancies, interviews, and work places are accessible. Interviewers receive appropriate training.	Work place is accessible
Monitor number of job applicants declaring a disability.	Ongoing – already in practice
Monitor Human Resources Policies and support procedures to ensure needs of disabled employees are taken into account. Disabled employees are not discriminated against. Interviewers receive appropriate training.	Co-Ownership already take this into consideration and have worked with Disability Action to ensure we comply with the needs of any disabled staff in the organisation.



- 3.6 **Co-Ownership Housing** will submit an Annual Report of progress in relation to the implementation of the Disability Action Plan to the Equality Commission, in complying with the statutory duties. This report, which will follow any guidance on annual reporting issued by the Equality Commission, will also be included in **Co-Ownership Housing's** annual report.
- 3.7 Moreover, **Co-Ownership Housing** will liaise closely with the Equality Commission to build a close working relationship so that progress on the implementation of the Disability Action Plan is maintained.
- 3.8 **Co-Ownership Housing** acknowledges the emphasis on consultation in the development and implementation of the Scheme, and is committed to full and meaningful consultation on its Disability Action Plan, equality impact assessments and monitoring arrangements. Details of this commitment are set out in the following section.

Complaints

- 3.9 When a complaint is made on the grounds that **Co-Ownership Housing** has failed to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the point of contact will be David McCallum or other responsible persons in Senior Management.
- | | |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Name | David McCallum, Operations Director |
| Address | Murray House, Murray Street, BELFAST |
| Tel No | 028 90 327276 |
| E-mail | <u>dmccallum@co-ownership.org</u> |
| Fax No | 028 90 330720 |
- 3.10 This Officer will carry out an internal investigation of the complaint and respond to the complainant within one month. During this process, the complainant will be kept fully informed of the procedures for dealing with the complaint under Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act. **Co-Ownership Housing** will also undertake to provide assistance to any complainant who requires information in a format that ensures equality of opportunity.
- 3.11 In any subsequent investigation by the Equality Commission, **Co-Ownership Housing** will co-operate fully, providing access to any relevant documentation that the Equality Commission may require. Similarly, **Co-Ownership Housing** will co-operate fully with any investigation by the Equality Commission under sub-para 11 (1) (b) of Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.



Review of the Scheme

- 3.12 **Co-Ownership Housing** will conduct a thorough review of the Scheme within five years of its submission to the Equality Commission. This review will evaluate the effectiveness of the organisation in meeting its Section 49A obligations. In undertaking this review Co-Ownership Housing will follow any guidance issued by the Equality Commission. A report of this review will be made public and sent to the Equality Commission.

4.0 Consultation

- 4.1 **Co-Ownership Housing** recognises the importance of consultation in all aspects of the implementation of its statutory duties. It affirms that all consultation will be carried out in accordance with the Equality Commission's Guiding Principles as detailed in its 'Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people and encouraging the participation of disabled people in public life – A Guide for Public Authorities'. In particular, it will endeavour to conduct all consultations in a timely, open and inclusive way in accordance with the Equality Commission's Guiding Principles.
- 4.2 **Co-Ownership Housing** will consult as widely as possible to ensure that any organisation or group which has a legitimate, particular interest in its work and/or the likely impact of its policies on the promotion of opportunity and good relations will be included in the process of engagement.

Those Being Consulted

- 4.3 **Co-Ownership Housing** will include the Equality Commission, the Community Relations Council, voluntary groups, community groups and Trade Union groups in all consultations whether or not they have a direct economic or social interest in the work of the **Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association**. Organisations representing the various categories included in Section 75 will also be included in any consultation carried out.

Timescale for Consultation

- 4.4 In order to facilitate meaningful consultation, **Co-Ownership Housing** will ensure that consultation with groups and individuals will begin as early as possible.
- 4.5 **Co-Ownership Housing** is conscious that some groups will need sufficient time to consult among themselves in order that their contributions to any consultation may be informed. All



consultations will aim to follow a period of at least eight weeks except in emergencies. Such situations will include:

- Policies which have to be implemented urgently to protect health and safety;
- Policies which have to be implemented urgently to comply with court judgements.

4.6 **Co-Ownership Housing** wishes to minimise the number of exceptions to good practice guidelines on the timescale for consultation. When exceptions do occur, **Co-Ownership Housing** will be reporting such instances. Exceptions to the normal eight week consultation period will be monitored, kept under review, justified very clearly and reported by **Co-Ownership Housing** in its annual report to the Equality Commission.

Procedures for Ensuring Inclusive Consultation

4.7 In consulting on any matter to which this scheme relates, **Co-Ownership Housing** will work with representative groups and individuals of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006) categories in order to identify how best to obtain their views. This may involve face-to-face meetings, advisory groups, surveys, consultative panels, Internet discussions and other innovative ways of consulting as there will be different means of consultation for different groups and it will be important to establish the basis for dialogue and engagement during the life of the scheme.

4.8 It is intended that barriers to proper consultation will be removed by ensuring that language is as clear as possible. Systems will be established to make presentations on the Scheme, if requested, available in an appropriate format to representatives of people with learning disabilities, minority community language speakers, people with disabilities, young people and travellers.

4.9 To ensure the highest level of inclusiveness in any policy decision making, information will be made available in consultation with groups affected by Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006). Systems will be in place to ensure that information will be available on request in accessible formats in a timely fashion such as Braille, disc and audio cassette.

4.10 Extra consideration will be given to ensuring that all consultations reflect the needs of young people and those with learning disabilities through the provision of accessible formats in a timely



matter. **Co-Ownership Housing** will liaise with representatives of learning disability organisations in the first place (by correspondence/direct communication) and take account of good practice elsewhere (eg. Lead Report/MENCAP's guidance on accessible formats), in order to reflect the needs of these groups in consultations.

- 4.11 **Co-Ownership Housing** believes it is especially important that sufficient timely and appropriate information is provided to enable affected groups and individuals to consider the full implications of proposals and it will take steps to ensure this. This will include quantitative and qualitative data that **Co-Ownership Housing** holds or has collated and other documents such as consultants' reports. This will apply to all consultants.
- 4.12 Specific training will be arranged for **Co-Ownership Housing** staff undertaking consultation exercises to ensure they have the necessary skills to communicate effectively. Any training delivered will be developed in consultation with relevant disability groups.
- 4.13 Steps will also be taken to ensure full participation in any consultation meetings that are held. **Co-Ownership Housing** will consider the time of day, the suitability of the venue, whether it can be accessed by those with disabilities, how the meeting is to be run and, for example, whether a signer is needed.

5.0 Joint Action with NIFHA

- 5.1 The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) is the umbrella body for the 36 registered and 7 non-registered housing associations in Northern Ireland.

All designated housing associations participated in a joint approach to the development of Disability Action Plan process co-ordinated by the NIFHA. The Federation assisted members in this process by:

- Developing a housing specific response template to ensure consistency of Disability Action Plans across the 35 designated associations
- organising pre-consultation training facilitated by Disability Action
- publicising the 8 week consultation period in the three main Northern Ireland daily papers
- issuing a composite disk containing the draft Disability Action Plans of all designated housing associations to the disability organisations listed at Appendix A (additional discs were also issued on request)
- Representing the housing association movement at joint consultation events hosted by the NI Housing Executive



- Acting as a conduit for information and consultee responses

5.2 Public Consultation

Designated housing associations consulted on their Disability Action Plans between Friday, 27 April and Friday 22 June 2007. Associations took comments or detailed responses from following Consultees into consideration when producing the final version of their Disability Action Plan:

- Carers NI
- Disability Action
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive events on 23 March & 10 May (participating organisations are listed at Appendix B)
- RNID
- Tenants & staff of the respective association
- Stakeholder organisations as listed by each association

NIFHA and its members would like to take this opportunity to record their thanks to all individuals and/or organisation that took the trouble to share their experience and submit their comments.

Corporate Actions

Action plan 2007 – 2010

Priority: Produce, monitor, report and review Disability Equality Scheme

	Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale
1.1	Develop, publish and promote Disability Awareness in line with our duties in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006)	To meet statutory duty and to promote the disability rights issues to staff and confirm a commitment to the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order in the work place and in our work practices. To promote good practice example within Co-Ownership.	Chief Executive/Board of Management	In line with strategic planning.
1.2	To create a culture of change within Co-Ownership Housing so that staff and Board members ensure disability issues are core to all its activities.	Ensure Disability issues are raised at meetings and initiatives are sought and are fully integrated into all aspects of strategy development and procedures.	Chief Executive/Board of Management	Ongoing
1.3	Develop strategies and policies in consultation with disability organisations taking their specific needs into account	Engage disability groups in consultation with Co-Ownership in the development of strategies and policies.	Human Resources/Equality Group	June 2007 and onwards.
1.4	Monitor Disability Equality Scheme	Disability Scheme is implemented on target and updated as appropriate.	Human Resources/Equality Group	June 2007 and six monthly thereafter.



Access and Communication

Action plan 2007 – 2010

Priority: Access to building and internal facilities, better communications and improved attitudes

	Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale
2.1	Review all policies to ensure commitment to Co-Ownership Housing's values in treating people with fairness, courtesy and respect.	A culture of understanding the basics of disability equality.	Corporate Management	January 2008
2.2	Recommendations made by organisations representative of disabled people to be addressed.	Consider recommendations and implement where necessary regarding disabled access issues to meet requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.	All Staff	January 2008 and onwards
2.3	Increase awareness of the availability of support services to Co-Ownership leaseholders recommending property adaptations and aids towards a better quality of living.	Disabled people will be able to enjoy a better quality of life in their home. Checklist to be created for Housing staff to take on visits.	All Staff	Ongoing



Recruitment and Selection

Action plan 2007 – 2010

Priority: Ensure better employment opportunities for disabled people.

	Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale
3.1	Ensure job vacancies are advertised as appropriate groups.	Increased awareness of job vacancies at Co-Ownership among disabled people.	Human Resources Officer	June 2007
3.2	Improve job packs to include options for colour contrast, access statements for interview process.	Information on vacancies, interviews, and work places are accessible. Interviewers receive appropriate training.	Human Resources Officer	June 2007
3.3	Promote existing work practices that encourage disabled people to apply for vacancies.	Disabled people feel confident when applying for job vacancies at Co-Ownership.	Human Resources Officer	Ongoing
3.4	Monitor number of job applicants declaring a disability and their satisfaction with the process.	Satisfaction with our processes can be monitored.	Human Resources Officer	Ongoing



Training

Action plan 2007 – 2010

Priority: Understanding of Disability Equality Issues by Co-Ownership Staff

	Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale
4.1	Develop staff training to include Disability Awareness Training and Equality obligations	Staff understand disability equality. Improvements in the organisation culture.	Equality Group	June 2007 and ongoing.
4.2	Review all organised training to ensure that disability equality issues are taken into account and all staff have access to appropriate learning and development activities.	All training opportunities are accessible and fully supported.	Human Resources Officer	June 2007 and ongoing.
4.3	Staff induction programme to include Disability Equality and Disability Awareness Training.	All staff members understand disability equality. Improved quality of service and organisational culture.	Human Resources Officer/Equality Group.	June 2007 and ongoing.
4.4	Offer Sign Language training for staff and monitor the effectiveness	Reception and other staff achieve introductory levels of sign language and deaf awareness	Human Resources Officer/Equality Group	From January 2008 and ongoing.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF ORGANISATIONS THAT RECEIVED DRAFT DISABILITY ACTION PLAN DISK – 27 APRIL 2007

Action Mental Health
Age Concern Northern Ireland
Barnardos
British Deaf Association (NI)
Brainwaves Northern Ireland
Carers Northern Ireland
Child Poverty Action Group (NI)
Blind Centre for NI
Community Development & Health Network (NI)
Disability Action
Down's Syndrome Association
Employers' Forum on Disability
Equality Commission for NI
Help the Aged Northern Ireland
Leonard Cheshire Foundation
MENCAP
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health
North West Forum of People with Disabilities
PRAXIS
Parents & Professionals & Autism
Rethink
Royal National Institute for the Blind (NI)
Royal Institute for Deaf People (NI)
Sense NI
The Cedar Foundation
The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association
Threshold – Richmond Fellowship NI



APPENDIX B

LIST OF ORGANISATIONS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE JOINT CONSULTATION EVENTS HOSTED BY NIHE

Action Mental Health
Advice NI
Cedar Foundation
CRC
Disability Action
Equality Commission
Information Commission
MENCAP
NITAP
North Down Community Network
Probation Board NI
PSNI
QUB
Rethink
RNIB
SCA
The Blind Centre
Visual Access NI
Women's Forum NI