



NATIONAL
HOUSING
FEDERATION

Level Threshold:

towards equality in housing
services for disabled people

Summary



business for diversity

Six commissioners have supported Level Threshold:



Level Threshold: towards equality in housing services for disabled people

Disabled residents are entitled to excellence in the services they receive. The National Housing Federation¹ is proud to present a checklist of principles and actions that will help bring disability issues and access to housing into the mainstream of housing association thinking. These principles and actions stem from our work with disabled people. They represent key challenges for associations in their efforts to include the needs and views of disabled people in the provision of homes and services.

A good practice guide supplements this booklet. It covers all the principles and key actions providing details on method, application and case examples. For more information please see the back page.

¹ This project was funded by the Housing Corporation and has been supported by four commissioners: Habinteg Housing Association, John Grooms Housing Association, Housing 21 and Yarrow Housing Association.

THE PRINCIPLES

1 Dismantling barriers

People are disabled by the **inaccessibility** of the built environment and society's negative attitudes, rather than by their impairments². This approach promotes the removal of barriers to inclusion, be they design, attitudinal or institutional in origin.

2 Removing discrimination

Disabled people experience **discrimination** when they are unable to access goods, services and facilities because of their disability. Associations must provide services that are equally accessible to disabled and non-disabled people.

3 Developing an action plan

Associations should tackle 'institutional discrimination' by reviewing their policies, practices, procedures and buildings. This should include a commitment to develop and implement an **action plan** of improvements that works to eliminate discrimination against disabled residents, applicants and staff.

4 Showing commitment

To achieve equality for disabled people, housing associations must have an understanding of inequality and demonstrate a commitment to **challenge** and actively promote equality.

² This approach is known as the 'Social Model' of disability.

KEY ACTION

5 Managing supply and demand

Associations should manage their homes with greater flexibility and creativity, by giving more choices to disabled residents and applicants.

Leading examples from associations include:

- proper research in partnership with the local planning authority to identify the housing needs of disabled people in the area to enable more appropriate allocations;
- thinking beyond 'bricks and mortar' and giving greater consideration to the wider need for public transport links, dedicated car-parking spaces, better environmental design and community facilities;
- participating in a shared 'Disability/Accessible Housing Register' so that details of accessible and adapted properties are made available to disabled applicants, enabling allocations to be more appropriate;
- involving disabled residents in the design and development of new-build and refurbishment projects.



KEY ACTION

6 Developing better housing by design

Associations should strive to meet the needs and aspirations of disabled people when developing and designing new neighbourhoods and housing.

Leading examples from associations include:

- building new homes to Lifetime Homes Standards³, with a proportion fully wheelchair-accessible⁴;
- when carrying out refurbishments and housing upgrades, considering the needs of existing tenants and seeking funding where available to meet accessibility standards including Lifetime Homes Standards;
- ensuring that architects, designers and contractors are committed to the principles of inclusive design⁵ and incorporating them in all new developments.

³ Lifetime Homes Standards incorporate 16 design criteria that apply to housing design. They create adaptability and flexibility in use to support the changing needs of households.

⁴ Wheelchair-housing has higher accessibility standards that enable a wheelchair user to have full use of all its rooms and facilities.

⁵ Inclusive design means working towards integrating the widest range of access needs in the design of buildings, public spaces and, more recently, products and services.

KEY ACTION

7 Communicating well

Associations should ensure that all their information and advice is accessible to disabled residents and applicants.

Leading examples from associations include:

- using plain language in all communications;
- making a commitment for all information to be accessible and available in a range of formats such as Braille, large print, on-line, 'easy read' or using pictures;
- designing websites that are accessible to people with visual impairments and people who are disabled in other ways;
- ensuring that frontline staff are skilled and confident with a variety of communication techniques to support residents and applicants with form-filling, interpreting information, giving advice and making complaints.



KEY ACTION

8 Housing management and support

Associations should review their activities to ensure that disabled people have equal access, and receive fair access, to services.

Leading examples from associations include:

- operating a maintenance and repair system that identifies residents who are vulnerable and prioritises repair and response times according to their needs;
- having an adequately resourced and transparent process for residents to access aids and adaptations;
- ensuring that all staff receive 'disability equality' training and ensuring that temporary staff and contractors are equally aware; and
- specifically monitoring the satisfaction of disabled tenants to ensure equality of service.



KEY ACTION

9 Promoting involvement and engagement

Associations should identify and remove barriers to participation, encouraging disabled residents to take part in the structures that feed into decision-making.

Leading examples from associations include:

- encouraging greater representation of disabled people on management boards and as employees and offering support including mentoring;
- being flexible and creative in getting disabled people involved, including targeting them specifically and demonstrating how they can influence decision making in the delivery of services;
- encouraging a greater use of information technology to facilitate the involvement of disabled people; and
- building partnerships with and supporting local community groups which promote the interests of disabled people.



KEY ACTION

10 Building inclusive communities

Housing providers should positively value disabled people as equal members of their communities, neighbourhoods and staff.

Leading examples from associations include:

- implementing specific strategies to tackle the harassment of disabled people;
- undertaking 'community street audits' where a group of residents surveys an area and suggests ways of improving it;
- broadening the traditional landlord-resident relationship to offer more than just housing services - these could include establishing employment opportunities, adult education classes and community events;
- supporting business enterprise initiatives for disabled people.



iN business for neighbourhoods

We are **iN business for neighbourhoods**, which works to:

- deliver excellent customer-focused services;
- improve the image of housing associations; and
- promote inclusive, mixed and sustainable communities by being **iN business for diversity**.

iN business for neighbourhoods is a national alliance of housing associations working to create successful neighbourhoods in cities, towns and villages across England. The National Housing Federation is their voice, and an advocate for affordable housing for all.

Visit the Federation's website to keep up to date with details of the full range of business solutions available:

www.housing.org.uk

For more information on iN business for neighbourhoods, see

www.iNbiz.org





For more information on this charter and its different formats, please check the following websites:
www.housing.org.uk and www.housingcorp.org.uk

A detailed good-practice guide for social housing providers, which complements this document, is available to buy from the National Housing Federation on tel: 0870 010 7676 or see www.housing.org.uk

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