



# Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service Disability Action Plan 2016-2021

Disability Discrimination Order (Northern Ireland) 2006

Human Resources  
Equality, Inclusion & Legal

**Protecting Our Community**

This document can be made available in alternative formats such as large print, Braille, disk, audio tape or in an ethnic-minority language upon request. Requests for alternative formats can be made to Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service by contacting:

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## Foreword

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) is committed to challenging discrimination and mainstreaming equality for our employees and also members of the community as a whole. We acknowledge that NIFRS has an important role in promoting equality and inclusion in employment and in our society.

When disability discrimination legislation was amended in 2006, public authorities were required to demonstrate how they would fulfil their duties to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and to encourage their participation in public life. Since then, NIFRS has endeavoured to strengthen relationships with disability organisations across Northern Ireland and to deliver on its original Disability Action Plan, first introduced in May 2007.

The original NIFRS Disability Action Plan has been reviewed and we have now set out our Disability Action Plan for 2016-2021. This concentrates on how we intend going forward on our statutory obligations '*to have regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities; and encourage participation by people in public life*'.

We look forward to continuing working with individuals and organisations on progressing Plan actions over the next five years, with the intent of making positive impact in both our employment activities and through our service delivery to the community.

Carmel McKinney  
Chair

Dale Ashford  
Chief Fire & Rescue Officer  
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**Northern Ireland  
Fire & Rescue Service**

# **Disability Action Plan 2016-2021**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006) places duties on public authorities, when carrying out their functions to have due regard to the need to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life

1.2 Under Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (the 'DDA'), NIFRS is also required to submit a Plan to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland showing how we propose to fulfil these duties in relation to our functions.

## **2. Our commitments**

### **Mainstreaming the Disability Duties**

2.1 NIFRS Board and Corporate Management Team are committed to effectively implementing the disability duties as set out in our Disability Action Plan (the 'Plan') 2016-2021. The 'Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Advice on Disability Action Plans' document has been considered in the developing the Plan.

Through effective internal arrangements we will ensure that all NIFRS Board Members, senior management and employees are aware of the disability duties and how disability equality can be effectively mainstreamed into all that we do.

## **2.2 Resources**

To deliver on the actions detailed in this Plan, NIFRS is aware that necessary resources (in terms of people, time and money) are required and commits to making appropriate resources available. We are also committed to ensuring that objectives and targets relating to the disability duties are included in corporate and annual business plans.

## **2.3 Internal arrangements**

We will put in appropriate internal arrangements in place to ensure that the disability duties are complied with and the Plan is successfully implemented. Overall responsibility lies with the NIFRS Board for ensuring that disability equality is achieved. Day to day responsibility for implementation of the Action Plan lies with the Director of Human Resources who, through the Human Resources Manager (Equality, Inclusion & Legal), is responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the Plan. Regular reports will be provided through the normal reporting structures to the Corporate Management Team and NIFRS Board.

## **2.4 Communication to staff**

We will communicate this Plan to employees and provide training and guidance. All employees will be provided with information on the Plan via

staff meetings, NIFRS Core Brief and email and as part of equality and inclusion training and specific Disability Awareness Training.

## 2.5 Training

We are committed to providing training on disability equality legislation and disability awareness for Board Members and employees using a variety of methods.

## 2.6 Consultation

We aim to consult with disabled people when implementing and reviewing this Plan. NIFRS recognises that not all people with a disability will choose to be represented by disability groups. We will ensure that people with disabilities and disability advocacy groups are involved when implementing, monitoring and reviewing the Plan. Engagement will ensure that people with disabilities are involved in helping us to:-

- identify barriers encountered by disabled people in their dealings with NIFRS.
- identify examples where we have not promoted positive attitudes towards disabled people and identify future opportunities to do so.
- set priorities and identify solutions to take remedial action.
- monitor and review how effective these measures have been.

Consultation may take the form of face to face meetings, consultation panels, surveys, e-consultation via NIFRS website and other good practice methodologies. We will make sure documents are available in alternative formats including large print, Braille, disc and audio cassette.

### **3. Reporting arrangements**

- 3.1 NIFRS will continue to submit Annual Progress Reports on the implementation of this Plan to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, in line with annual Section 75 reporting requirements.
- 3.2 Our corporate planning process will reflect objectives, targets and monitoring on disability equality. Progress on meeting disability duties objectives will also be regularly reported to the Corporate Management Team and the NIFRS Board.
- 3.3 A copy of this Plan and NIFRS Annual Progress Reports will be published on the NIFRS website [www.nifrs.org](http://www.nifrs.org)
- 3.4 After five years we will look at our Plan again to determine what progress we have made and determine what else we need to do.

### **4 NIFRS functions**

- 4.1 NIFRS protects and serves the entire population of Northern Ireland (population 1.81 million) providing a fire and rescue service across an area of over 5,500 square miles.
- 4.2 Under the Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, we respond to:-
  - Fires
  - Road traffic collisions

- Specialist rescue incidents
- Flooding
- Chemical incidents
- Collapsed buildings and other types of rescue incidents.

4.3 NIFRS is divided into 4 operational Command Areas – Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western. Each Area Command has an Area Commander, responsible for managing operational activity on a day to basis. The 4 Area Commands are supported by 14 Districts, strategically placed across Northern Ireland creating a community focus for our activities. District Commands are responsible for the Fire Stations in their Districts. There are 68 Fire Stations across Northern Ireland. NIFRS Headquarters is based in Lisburn, Co Antrim and the Fire & Rescue Training Centre is located at Boucher Crescent, Belfast.

4.4 The main decision making bodies in NIFRS are the Board and also the Corporate Management Team. The NIFRS Board is responsible for steering the future management and operational direction of NIFRS. The NIFRS Board and its Committees meet routinely during the year. The Corporate Management Team is based at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters, Lisburn and comprises the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Operations, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Community Development, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Operational Support, Director of Human Resources, Director of Finance and the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance.

- 4.5 NIFRS provides a range of community engagement initiatives to help reduce risk and keep people safe from the dangers of fire and other types of incidents that we respond to.
- 4.6 We have a dedicated 999 Regional Control Centre where all the Fire 999 calls for Northern Ireland are answered and Fire Crews are mobilised to respond.
- 4.7 In addition to the fundamental role of protecting our community, we also undertake the following key functions:
- training and development of NIFRS Firefighters
  - integrated risk management planning and allocating operational resources based on community risk profile
  - partnership working with other emergency services
  - targeted community safety education initiatives
- 4.8 We have adopted a range of strategies, plans, policies and procedures to support and implement the above and to provide a comprehensive Fire and Rescue service to the people of Northern Ireland.

## **5 Public life positions**

- 5.1 NIFRS is sponsored by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and does not have responsibility for Public Life positions. NIFRS Board Members are appointed by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland on behalf of the Minister and the sponsoring Department. NIFRS does have responsibility for engaging with

user forums, consultation panels, partnerships and alliances with the voluntary and community sectors to inform the design and delivery of our service and policy development. We will take all appropriate steps to encourage people with disabilities to join these groups where possible.

5.2 At present, there is currently an under-representation of disabled people on the NIFRS Board and we will continue to focus on the under-representation of disabled people in public life and raise this appropriately. We are committed to this through the Plan; our approved Equality Scheme and also the NIFRS long-term Equality & Diversity Strategy 2010-2020.

5.3 Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, NIFRS has undertaken a number of previous measures to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and to encourage participation in public life. We have worked closely with people with disabilities as well as disability advocacy groups. Examples of our activities include:

#### **Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people**

- Member of Employers' for Disability NI
- Provision of equality training that includes focus on disability awareness and disability equality
- Recruitment & Selection Training
- Partnership working with Trust Multi-Sensory Teams in relation to home fire safety for those with hearing loss, sight loss or dual sensory loss
- Provision of work experience placements for adults with learning disabilities

- Creation of an Impairment Case Conference team to consider reasonable adjustments for employees and job applicants
- Provision of dyslexia support for employees and job applicants

### **Encouraging the participation of disabled people in public life**

- Workplace policies
- Policy screening

## **6. Review of original Disability Action Plan**

6.1 NIFRS published its first Disability Action Plan in 2007. NIFRS has endeavoured to maintain focus on disability equality in an ongoing challenging financial environment. A review of the original Plan has been carried out and the table below details the completed actions and outcomes in each of the key areas.

6.2 The NIFRS Section 75 Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, which is approved by the NIFRS Board and published on the NIFRS website, includes an annual report on Disability Action Plan implementation. Review of the original Plan also considered the 'Advice on Disability Action Plans' published by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in July 2015. Review of key areas of focus, the action taken and outcomes are detailed on pages 12-16.

Key areas of focus	Actions Taken	Outcomes
Disabled peoples' views taken on board in NIFRS decision making processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 75 consultation processes includes focus on disability equality issues</li> <li>• Accredited membership of Employers for Disability NI attained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Engagement with representatives from Disability sector</li> <li>➤ Disability advocacy groups included in all stakeholder consultation lists and targeted consultation exercises</li> <li>➤ Access to expert knowledge and guidance</li> </ul>
Corporate communications compliance with disability duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility of website maintained to AA level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Facility to rescale to make it larger</li> <li>➤ Review of website content and functionality by Corporate Communications and IT during 2016</li> </ul>
Create more positive attitudes and skills among staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disability awareness training delivered to staff</li> <li>• Recruitment and selection panels trained in disability duties and disability awareness</li> <li>• Review Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection to include reference to guaranteed shortlisting for people with disabilities where candidate meets minimum essential criteria for post</li> <li>• Monitoring of all diversity training and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Training materials regularly updated in relation to disability equality</li> <li>➤ Disability legislation and awareness key element of Equality, Inclusion &amp; Dignity at Work training programme</li> <li>➤ 'Barriers in recruitment and selection' included in Recruitment and Selection training for panels</li> <li>➤ Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection was reviewed in September 2014 Further review due in 2016</li> <li>➤ All equality and diversity training recorded and monitored. Training needs analysis conducted annually</li> </ul>

discussed in annual Section 75 progress report to Equality Commission.

- Awareness amongst employees increased of disability issues in both employment and in the community. Greater awareness amongst line managers regarding consideration of reasonable adjustments and the corporate process for doing so
- Corporate Review on Reasonable Adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 carried out on NIFES practice on reasonable adjustments for employees and job applicants with dyslexia. The Corporate Management Team agreed recommendations and actions on recruitment and selection documentation, policy review and implementation, and for tailored support for individuals, e-recruitment requirements, content and approach to recruitment information sessions, communication on the role of the Impairment Case Conference and also quality assurance measures to assure disability equality in making reasonable adjustments, particularly for cases of dyslexia.
- 'Workhear' training via weekly training

		<p>sessions on deaf awareness, facilitated by Action on Hearing Loss in conjunction with Employers for Disability NI, rolled out for a number of NIFRS employees involved in Community Safety roles in front-facing reception roles</p>
<p>Acquire accurate quantitative data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring of applicants, shortlisted applicants and appointees with disabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ All job applicants with disabilities monitored throughout each stage of the selection process through to appointment</li> <li>➤ NIFRS Impairment Case Conference team established to considers reasonable adjustments for employees and job applicants Arrangements put in place to support both existing employees with disabilities who apply for vacancies and external job applicants</li> <li>➤ Information on employees with SpLDs and appropriate adjustments maintained and reviewed by Impairment Case Conference Team</li> </ul>
<p>Provide work experience for people with disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship with Stepping Stones developed. Seek to support additional organisations where possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Administration and Manual Technician Support placements provided at Fire &amp; Rescue Service Headquarters.</li> </ul>
<p>Active outreach to disabled</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance at careers fairs, interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Support given to range of careers events</li> </ul>

<p>people</p>	<p>skills training and site visits to promote NIFRS career opportunities for people with disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that Community Development Strategy includes engagement with people with disabilities as part of its targeted home safety and youth initiatives</li> <li>• Ensure that Integrated Risk Management Planning includes data collection on dwellings and areas of risk pertaining to people with disabilities</li> <li>• Provide details of publicly advertised NIFRS vacancies to Disablement Advisory Service and other disability organisations</li> <li>• Creation of a monitoring system of the reasonable adjustments made for employees with disabilities</li> <li>• Inclusion of welcoming statement in recruitment advertisements</li> </ul>	<p>across schools and colleges in Northern Ireland and also under the Business Education Partnership umbrella. Careers Guide including reference to disability equality developed and downloadable from NIFRS website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Outreach materials with positive equality messages issued at careers and safety events</li> <li>➤ Collaboration and partnership with Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD) to obtain direct access to people with disabilities and prioritise free home fire safety checks for disabled people in local areas. In cases of high risk LCD will consider funding new assistive technologies eg portable mist systems, vibrating smoke alarms or cooker shut off systems to provide enhanced protection and reduce risk of fire occurring in first place. LCD provides direct access to this group</li> <li>➤ Joint Emergency Services Disability Group with PSNI and NIAS established to consider collaborative working in taking forward the disability duties. Feedback from the British Deaf</li> </ul>
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		<p>Association resulted in a joint review of the Emergency SMS Text Service. Data review on uptake of the facility in NIFRS is ongoing</p>
<p>Improved accessibility and opportunities within NIFRS working environments</p>	<p>Maintain programme of capital works that is DDA compliant and ensures accessibility of all NIFRS premises          Assess impact of Government new 'Workable' Programme for employees who have or develop a disability to remain in work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ All capital works programmes include routine assessment of DDA requirements</li> <li>➤ Employment under 'Workable' Programme implemented for one individual with a disability, based at Fire &amp; Rescue Service HQ, Lisburn</li> </ul>

## **7. Updated Plan actions 2016-2021**

- 7.1 Following review of the original Plan and in consideration of existing NIFRS Equality & Inclusion Strategy, we have developed an updated five year Plan and action measures for 2016-2021. NIFRS will continue to engage and consult with disabled people in the implementation, monitoring and further review of the Plan.
- 7.2 We are committed to monitoring and reviewing policies and practices to ensure that the disability duties are being met. The Plan will also be reviewed annually as part of the statutory Section 75 Progress Report submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.
- 7.3 It is our intention to continue to work on changing attitudes and removing physical barriers in our organisation. We are seeking to make tangible improvements in the lives of people with disabilities. The updated NIFRS Disability Action Plan 2016-2021 is detailed overleaf at Appendix 1.

## **8 Guiding principles on the implementation of the Plan**

- 8.1 We will endeavour to be inclusive of people with disabilities when making decisions and delivering on the actions outlined in the updated Plan 2016-2021. When working with disabled people we will make the necessary changes in how we conduct our meetings to ensure meaningful participation by all involved.
- 8.2 NIFRS recognises the varying needs of people with disabilities and will also seek to address the needs of people on the basis of their other equality

identities, for example, women with disabilities, young people and older people with disabilities, minority ethnic people with disabilities. We acknowledge the benefits of working in partnership with a range of other organisations in support of meeting the needs of individuals.

- 8.3 We will continue to work in partnership with the disability sector in the implementation and review of the Plan.

## **9 How the Plan will be published**

- 9.1 When the Plan is submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland it will be placed on the NIFRS website and internally on the 'Global Folder' for employees. The Plan will also be available from the HR Manager, Equality, Inclusion & Legal (see contact details at start of this document).
- 9.2 The Plan will be produced in clear print and plain language and will be made available in alternative formats on request, including large print, DAISY, Braille, easy-read, audio cassette and computer disc.

Updated Disability Action Plan 2016-2021

Appendix 1

Strategic issue/ theme	Actions/Measures	Desired outcome	Timescale	Performance Indicators
<b>Mainstreaming disability duties/ Encouraging participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will actively engage and consult with disabled people as part of:-                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Policy development and review</li> <li>○ Service user feedback</li> <li>○ Employee attitudes survey</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Improved opportunities for disabled people to influence and be involved in NIFRS strategy and policy making</li> <li>○ Positive measures/barriers identified by existing employees (with and without disabilities)</li> </ul>	March 2016 to February 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Disability advocacy groups included in updated consultee lists</li> <li>➤ Feedback received from disability groups, via formal responses/direct questionnaires/face to face meetings</li> <li>➤ NIFRS Customer service surveys inclusive of disabled community</li> <li>➤ Employee attitudes survey implemented and findings published</li> </ul>
<b>Encouraging participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will review the Code of Procedures on Recruitment &amp; Selection and implement a Reasonable Adjustments Policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Barriers removed for people with disabilities, where possible, to accessing and retaining employment in NIFRS</li> </ul>	September 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Review of Code of Procedures inclusive of positive measures in recruitment for disabled people</li> <li>➤ Reasonable Adjustments Policy consulted under Section 75 including engagement with disability people and groups</li> </ul>

Strategic issue/ theme	Actions/Measures	Desired outcome	Timescale	Performance Indicators
<b>Encouraging participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In advance of and during recruitment of new NIFRS Board Members, we will request that DHSSPS encourage applications from with disabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Diversity reflected in NIFRS Board composition.</li> <li>○ Board Member identified as ‘Disability Champion’</li> </ul>	March 2016 to February 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ NIFRS involved in raising awareness of Board Member vacancies as and when they arise, through social media and direct contact with disability groups, during the lifecycle of Plan</li> </ul>
<b>Promoting positive attitudes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will continue to improve accessibility to the NIFRS Estate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ All NIFRS premises accessible and DDA compliant</li> </ul>	June 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Updated DDA Audit of locations carried out by Estates and reported to Board and in Section 75 and DDO Annual Progress Report</li> </ul>
<b>Promoting positive attitudes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will review all communication practice to ensure information is accessible</li> <li>• We will identify opportunities for employees to learn and maintain sign language skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Improved accessibility of NIFRS corporate information and website</li> <li>○ Disability related information included in NIFRS communications and info bulletins</li> </ul>	March 2017 to February 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Evidence of increased number of NIFRS documents produced in easy read</li> <li>➤ Database established of employees with sign language skills and updated during Plan lifecycle</li> </ul>

Strategic issue/ theme	Actions/Measures	Desired outcome	Timescale	Performance Indicators
<b>Training and Development/ Promoting positive attitudes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will continue to deliver equality and inclusion training to employees at all levels and to Board Members</li> <li>• Specific disability duties training will be developed and delivered</li> <li>• Access to e-learning programme inclusive of disability equality will be explored</li> <li>• We will explore issuing guidance on autism awareness for operational employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Educated and informed employees, negative attitudes and stereotypes challenged. Positive attitudes towards disability reinforced.</li> <li>○ Autism awareness increased amongst operational personnel</li> </ul>	September 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Review of disability element of in-house equality and inclusion training in conjunction with disability advocacy groups</li> <li>➤ Updated module developed and rolled-out via training lecture protocols, info bulletins, induction courses and in-house supervisory training programme</li> <li>➤ Disabled employees have full access to training and development opportunities</li> <li>➤ Autism Awareness information available to all employees</li> </ul>

Strategic issue/ theme	Actions/Measures	Desired outcome	Timescale	Performance Indicators
<b>Promoting positive attitudes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will continue to maintain accreditation with Employers for Disability NI</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Continued access to good practice advice and guidance</li> <li>○ Opportunities to avail of training and support for policy development and reviews</li> </ul>	September 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Evidence gathered annually in support of gaining award</li> <li>➤ Accreditation awarded to NIFRS for each year of Plan</li> </ul>
<b>Compliance/ promoting positive attitudes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will bid for suitable budget allocation from Finance Directorate to meet Plan action measures</li> <li>• Disability duties actions will be included in HR Business Plan annual objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Actions under the Plan and also the Equality &amp; Inclusion Strategy 2010-2020 will be enabled</li> <li>○ Focus on disability duties maintained</li> </ul>	March 2016 to February 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Business cases completed, approved and budget allocated for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Training</li> <li>○ disability advocacy group membership</li> <li>○ printing/alternative formats</li> <li>○ assistive technologies and occupational psychologist assessments (dyslexia and other SpLDs)</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Targets for Plan actions met in annual business plan cycle</li> </ul>

