

Equity and Access for People with Disabilities Policy (#3211)

Adopted: 25 June 2013

Background

The Council recognises that access is an issue for people experiencing disabilities. Lack of access to buildings and other facilities is an obstacle in obtaining employment, education, entertainment, health care, and other services.

The Council is committed to promoting good practice in improving the participation of people in local government. It is essential that people with disabilities have input into decisions on local services and facilities that affect their lives. As an advocate for all citizens of the Far North, the Council has responsibilities to advocate for access and equity issues as they relate to people with disabilities.

The Council is an Equal Opportunity Employer and considers it is the right of all persons with disabilities to have the opportunity to be engaged in productive and meaningful employment which provides flexibility, equal opportunity and career path development. The Council is committed to providing training to create the right culture and to raise awareness of people experiencing disabilities.

The information needs of those who cannot use standard means of communication must be recognised. This includes people who have disabilities of hearing and/or vision, who have communication disabilities who use facilitative communication, as well as those who need help in using the information provided. Information must be available in a form appropriate to peoples' needs.

Objective

1. Council services, facilities and assets are accessible to people with a wide range of abilities.
2. Council staff are aware of disability in the community and receive appropriate training
3. Council are active champions of an inclusive society
4. Council has the opportunity to contribute towards this objective through the following roles:

Advocate - Council can advocate for access issues as they relate to people with disabilities.

Planner - Planning permission is sometimes needed to undertake development and the Council has an opportunity to influence development of the Far North.

Provider - The Council is a key provider of facilities and services including information and library services, pensioner housing, parks, sports facilities, community halls, and infrastructure services.

Employer – Council ensures that workers with disabilities are able to successfully pursue a career in Council by ensuring a fair and inclusive workplace.

Regulator – The Council has a regulatory function to ensure that quality standards and safety are maintained and barriers to access are removed.

Policies

1. Council will endeavour to ensure that people with disabilities have equitable access to facilities and the built environment by:

- a. Designing, constructing and maintaining footpaths, crossings, paved areas and streets in ways, which facilitate their safe and practical use
 - b. Addressing specific road safety issues raised by people with disabilities. These include problems with specific pedestrian crossings and intersections and uneven footpath surfaces
 - c. Designing, providing and monitoring the use of mobility parking so that it is physically accessible, affordable, safe to use and appropriately located
 - d. Enforcing regulations relating to footpaths and streets to allow people with disabilities to move about unobstructed (this includes, for example, cars parked across entrance ways and sandwich boards on footpaths)
 - e. Ensuring all Council services, facilities, amenities and places of recreation (for example parks and reserves, libraries and cultural venues) provide opportunities for people with disabilities to attend and participate where practicable
 - f. Consulting people with disabilities in the early planning and design stages of major Council facility developments and redevelopments
 - g. Enforcing statutory requirements for buildings and amenities to ensure their compliance with Building Act, Building Code and NZ4121: 1985 Code of Practice. New Zealand Standard 4121: Design for Access and Mobility - Buildings and Associated Facilities.
2. Council will ensure that people experiencing disabilities have opportunities to fully participate in Council design, planning, and decision making by:
- a. Ensuring that the views of the disability community are considered in decisions which affect them
 - b. Establishing a disability action group consisting of people from the disability community to provide a voice direct to Council.
3. Council will ensure the rights of people with disabilities are upheld and promoted through advocacy and partnerships by:
- a. Identifying and taking up opportunities to advocate for equity and access for people with disabilities.
 - b. Establishing ongoing communication with organisations in the disability community
 - c. Building the capacity of disability groups to take responsibility for advocating on their own behalf, e.g. Disability Action Group
 - d. Funding and supporting disability advocacy services in accordance with Council funding policies.
 - e. Advocating for policies, programmes, practices, and procedures that guarantee equal opportunity for all people with disabilities
 - f. Encouraging the portrayal of persons with disabilities by the media in a positive way, particularly the Council's own publications and publicity material
 - g. Participating in the development and implementation of the New Zealand Disability Strategy through submissions and participation in other consultation opportunities.
4. The Council has an Equal Employment Opportunities environment and a diverse workforce and will:
- a. Encourage and facilitate the employment and development of staff with disabilities
 - b. Ensure that communication services, resources, and flexible workplace options are available
 - c. Ensure that job modification, skills training and on the job training is available
 - d. Endeavour to eliminate discriminatory or insensitive behaviour
 - e. Implement the requirements of the Health and Safety Act.
5. Council will ensure staff and elected member disability training programmes are available at all levels within the Council by:
- a. Ensuring that Council staff and elected members undertake disability awareness training

- b. Ensuring that Barrier Free training is provided to technical staff such as building officers and project managers.
6. Council will ensure communication with people with disabilities allows and encourage access to Council information, events, services, and facilities by:
- a. Ensuring staff are aware of the need and are encouraged to provide information in various ways to meet different needs e.g. sign language
 - b. Where appropriate, ensuring information is available in alternative formats that are easier for the wider disability community to access, for example website, text, message services, large print, simple language and diagrams, radio, and email
 - c. Where appropriate, providing information about services in a variety of media (for example, publicising telephone and fax numbers and providing print information and radio notices)
 - d. Providing information about Council events and services for use by disability networks
 - e. Where appropriate, ensuring all Council facilities have clear signs which include internationally recognised symbols and indicators.