



**Armagh City  
Banbridge  
& Craigavon**  
Borough Council

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Borough Council**

# **Disability Action Plan**

**We Asked, You Said,**

**We Did**

**(July 2024)**

## **Background**

This Plan states the commitment of Council to the promotion of equality of opportunity for disabled people and complements our Equality Scheme under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

It has been designed to ensure that we fulfil our statutory obligations in compliance with Disability legislation.

The Disability Discrimination Act places duties on us to:

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

These are collectively referred to as 'the disability duties.'

The Council is committed to the fulfilment of its disability duties in all parts of the organisation and this plan sets out how it intends to do this.

Our Proposed Disability Action Plan 2024-2027 identifies how, within our resources we feel we can best meet the needs of disabled customers, colleagues and visitors to our borough.

The consultation closed on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2024 and 49 people/organisations responded. An analysis of the results shows that 96% to 98% of respondents agreed with our proposed actions.

Comments and feedback were summarised and forwarded to relevant departments for consideration in line with their business plans and service delivery. The relevant departments provided general feedback to the responses received to facilitate, 'We asked, You Said, We Did' facility, thereby closing the feedback loop on the consultation process.

As a result of the feedback received regarding the importance of consultation and engagement a further action has been added to the plan under the theme of partnership working and it is to facilitate an annual stakeholder engagement event. This will provide us with the opportunity to engage with the public as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.

In the section below, we provide a brief update on how Council currently addresses the matters raised from the feedback. Not all proposed actions received additional comments.

## **Raising Awareness and Training**

### ***You said:***

We should consider Disability Champions and communication is key in delivering the InclusiveABC message. You mentioned a disability inclusion officer and involvement of members in the Age Sector platform. You had concerns about resources to implement our plan and noted that these are equality duties. You also noted that training should be monitored.

### ***We did:***

We have 4 Diversity Ambassadors appointed (Lord Mayor, Deputy Lord Mayor, Policy, Equality & Diversity Manager and Organisational Development and Performance Manager). We are working with colleagues across the 11 Councils in NI to bring together best practice in the sector and assist in the integration of Equality & Diversity into all aspect of local government work.

The plan includes a combination of new and ongoing existing actions that have had a positive impact on promotion of equality for disabled people, and we are committed to implementing these. All decisions are equality screened in compliance with Section 75 legislation ensuring that equality is embedded across all of our Council functions.

We have delivered a mix of staff training over the last year including Mental Health First Aid, Autism awareness, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and Disability Awareness. Equality and Code of Conduct training is also offered twice a year for elected members. Online modules covering Equality and Diversity in the Workplace and Autism Awareness were also made available to staff.

We continue to work with department heads to ensure that all staff have access to both training and practical support in order to meet the needs of customers.

As part of our partnership agreement with Disability Sport NI the Inclusive Sport & Leisure Officer is hosted by our Sports Development team and they offer 2 free training courses on Inclusive Skills & Games Training per year for staff and local sports clubs who are involved in the All-Stars Summer Scheme and the Coach Education Programme.

In addition to this staff in the South Lake Leisure Centre also received Disability Inclusion Training this year as part of the Inclusive Sports Facilities Accreditation they received.

The Market Place Theatre and Navan Centre, Armagh currently hold the Autism NI Impact Award, ensuring a more accessible environment for our neurodivergent customers. As part of this process, staff worked alongside Autism NI to gain knowledge in the fundamentals of Autism. A range of adjustments within these venues aim to help individuals with autism and their families to enjoy every aspect of their visit.

Council has been working to ensure the accessibility of our buildings, but also offers a wide range of programmes across our Corporate, Tourism and Leisure functions. We continue to update and populate the InclusiveABC section of our Corporate website and welcome customer feedback on the range of inclusive information related to Council functions.

***You also said:***

We should look at accessible parking, changing facilities, inclusive play parks and an annual stakeholder engagement event.

***We did:***

We contacted colleagues in the various departments to highlight your comments and have included links to the Council's [Changing places policy](#) which was approved in September 2023 and a [Mobile accessible toilet facility](#) which is now available for large scale events where changing places facilities are not currently available. The policy states the Council's commitment to '*give due consideration to including a Changing Places Toilet when it extends or extensively refurbishes an existing Council-owned building that if being constructed as a new building would fall under the parameters requiring it to have a Changing Places Toilet provided*'.

We also have a contract with AccessAble who provides surveys of a number of Council and Borough facilities, and this enables disabled visitors to make informed decisions about accessibility at their chosen venue.

We are a member of the national disability network RADAR (The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation). This means that if you are disabled and living within the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough, you can get a Radar key to use in any of our Public

Toilets including Changing places facilities. These keys also provide access to any public toilet in the UK that has been locked to protect it from vandalism or misuse. Keys can be purchased from our Civic buildings in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon for £3.20/key.

As a commitment in the Play Strategy 2018-2026, 43 of our 95 play parks have been upgraded with inclusive play equipment. All play parks are designed to be inclusive and offer opportunities for children regardless of their needs and abilities. Sensory & Communication Boards will be included in all new/refurbished play parks. The remaining parks will be considered as part of the continued delivery of the Play Strategy and inclusive play remains a priority.

We have also developed an internal staff 'Inclusive ABC' group which is representative of staff from a wide range of departments. This group offers council colleagues an opportunity to share expertise and learning across departments. In order to Inform and support the work of the operational Inclusive ABC Working Group a Strategic Inclusive ABC Working Group is chaired by an elected member, meets quarterly to consider disability issues in Council and is open to engaging with local & regional sectoral stakeholders where necessary to inform future service delivery.

We developed internal guidance to support colleagues with public consultation and engagement. Examples of methods used include surveys, online consultations, email and postal correspondence, social media and face to face events. The Council facilitated an Autism Focus Group in March 23 in partnership with IncredABLE and the engagement from both young people and carers was hugely informative.

We value customer engagement, and our challenge remains, how best to facilitate engagement that values and recognises the voluntary commitment of people/groups to attend and is open to everyone across the borough.

## **Partnership Working**

### ***You said:***

We should collaborate more with other groups and have more inclusive events including accessible swimming lessons and be responsive to times that suit children who have to travel further for inclusive gym sessions. You noted you would like disability specific classes including gymnastics for children with Down's Syndrome. You noted team sports were important, you had concerns about accessibility to the splash sessions for disabled children/families and one person noted a concern about cameras in the changing rooms. One person also noted the availability of free swims for people with health conditions in another council area and another noted the desire for more picture board signage in government buildings.

### ***We did:***

We continue to work with and are always open to working with a range of groups/organisations across the Borough and recognise that the lived experience of carers and disabled people will always be vital to ensuring that we meet the needs of all our customers.

We are currently training an additional 10 swimming teachers across the Borough as part of our internal training. It is anticipated that when they are fully qualified, we will be in a position to deliver more classes. Our aquatics team are reviewing pool availability to ensure we can maximise classes and their availability. Following stakeholder feedback, we have reviewed our process for assessing needs to deliver our service and we are finalising this process.

In addition to this we have planned small group sessions for those with additional needs to run as part of our summer programme as a pilot for the full roll out. The summer swimming programme also offers 1:1 lessons.

In relation to the timing of the Gym sessions this was brought to our attention during our recent programme, and we became aware that school finishing times vary by area. Times will be reviewed next year to better accommodate families.

The All-Stars Disability Summer Scheme is delivered in Gilford Community Centre each year over a 3 week period. Through centralised provision, we can offer a specialised service, pulling together a range of support systems in one location. The facility is quieter than other sites, we have almost exclusive use of it for the 3 weeks, and the areas available are a perfect fit for our children and young people, including a large activity hall, a smaller activity space and a Changing Places Toilet.

Our partners, Disability Sport NI, deliver the ABC Inclusive Summer Scheme, this year offered in Banbridge and Richhill. In partnership with the SHSCT, the DSNi officers are also delivering a Senior scheme in Armagh, based on a referral process.

We are aware of other providers in the area, e.g. Down's and Proud, local Special Schools etc who provide opportunities for children with disabilities.

We are always open to extending our programmes and work closely with our partners including SHSCT and Disability Sport NI in this respect. Feedback on these schemes enables us to continually improve upon what is offered.

We are continually updating our leisure & recreation programme information on our social media channels, through partner engagements and on GetActiveABC, on our InclusiveABC page and on [www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk](http://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk)

Further details about the external organisations who deliver programmes across our facilities are included in our InclusiveABC page.

Our Inclusive Sport and Leisure Officer (employed by Disability Sport NI, funded by Council) established the Craigavon Boccia Club and they provide opportunities for both individuals and teams to train and compete in a NI league. This officer also supported the Inline Sled Hockey and Ulster Wheelchair Hurling Clubs when they were first setting up. Council and the ABC Sports Forum support the work of the Banbridge Barbarians Mixed Ability Rugby Team through coach education, recognition at sports awards and equipment loan. In addition the Craigavon Lakers Wheelchair Basketball club train in South Lake Leisure centre on Wednesdays from 7-8.30pm.

For more information on Clubs/organisations who provide team sports

- Go to <https://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/resident/abc-sports-directory/> to see the Council directory of sports clubs affiliated to the Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Sports Forum who offer a range of sporting and physical activity opportunities across the Borough for all abilities.
- A range of specific programmes can be viewed through our Inclusive Sports & Leisure Initiative programme including team sports such as Wheelie Active Club, Boccia and other programmes.
- Visit Disability Sports NI website.

The use of cameras by the public is not permitted in the changing rooms as per Council's Safeguarding Policy, and we have signage erected stating this. If staff observe anyone using a camera they are trained to deal with this safeguarding issue.

Access to Splash sessions is either paid per use or can be accessed for free as part of a membership package. For information on membership [click here](#).

The Physical Activity Referral, Scheme, PARS operates in Orchard Leisure Centre, Armagh, Banbridge Leisure Centre and South Lake Leisure Centre in Craigavon. The scheme offers specialised exercise and activity programmes for people diagnosed with a variety of medical conditions. The activity programmes are facilitated by Registered Fitness Professionals, who are qualified.

The scheme facilitates conditions such as cardiac disease, diabetes mellitus, obesity, mental health conditions and musculo-skeletal disorders, to name a few. Clients can only be referred onto the scheme by their GP, Practice Nurse, Consultant Dietician or Physiotherapist.

Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council provides free swimming:

- Adults of 60 years of age and over for each swim session during public swimming times.
- Children of 4 years and under for each swim session during public swimming times.
- Carers will be able to avail of swimming activities free when accompanying those with a disability.
- Those with a disability for each swim session during public swimming times.

In relation to pictorial signage we will take this to the next Inclusive ABC Operational Working Group for discussion.

## **Increasing Disability access and Inclusion**

### ***You said:***

You recommended ticketing accessible events and inclusive actions and standards of accessibility in Council tenders, over 50's activities and reminded us that communication is important and not everyone is on social media. You asked about employment opportunities for disabled people.

### ***We did:***

Last year the Tourism, Arts and Culture events team developed a very different approach to the Georgian light show by requesting specific information from people with access and sensory needs and they were able to offer a bespoke service catering for all requests and feedback was very positive. As a result of this the events team now encourage all participants with disabilities or sensory needs to contact them so that adjustments can be made, where possible.

We commit to engage with our Procurement Team to identify how Inclusive actions are considered in all procurement exercises.

In relation to Autism cards this is something we can look at further in partnership with disability and carers groups.

[Get Moving ABC](#) is a Borough wide targeted initiative, where a range of local organisations and groups work collectively to motivate and support as many people as possible to achieve

the recommended physical activity levels. In relation to people aged 50+ we have a number of options available through our [GetActiveABC](#) [Get Social](#) inclusive programmes which are available to disabled and non-disabled people.

In addition to this please visit our [Age Friendly](#) section [www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk](http://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk) of the website and you can click on the link to join the age friendly database which will keep you updated by email or post on any new programmes or services that are coming on board for people aged 50+.

The [Get Out, Get Active \(GOGA\)](#) Programme provides a range of inclusive physical activities, such as GOGA Fit (a seated or standing circuit style class), Tai Chi and Nordic Walking in various locations across the borough. All of these inclusive sessions are suitable for all ages and abilities, and in particular those who have been inactive or less active.

The [Inclusive Sports and Leisure Initiative](#) is a partnership programme between Disability Sport NI and Council, established in 2012. It is the role of our Inclusive Sport & Leisure Officer, employed by Disability Sport NI through funding from Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, to develop and sustain a programme of disability sports and physical recreation opportunities which help improve the health and wellbeing of disabled people. The inclusive gym programme offers 1:1 gym induction for people with disabilities, followed by a few confidence building sessions in the gym, before participants are encouraged to attend independently.

We try to reach the widest audience and social media has enabled us to reach out to many people however we recognise that not everyone will be on social media and appreciate the efforts of the social media champions who are sharing this information verbally with others. In addition to this we encourage people to visit our websites on

[www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/](http://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/)

<https://visitarmagh.com/>

<https://getactiveabc.com/>

We also have an inclusive section on our website with information relating to facilities and activities <https://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/inclusiveabc/>

You can also call in to visit any of our facilities, let them know where your interests are and ask to be included in their mailing lists. This allows us to keep you up to date when new programmes are being offered which may be of interest to you.

## **Encourage Participation of Disabled People in Public Life**

### ***You said:***

You'd like to see more employment & volunteering opportunities for disabled people.

### ***We did:***

We have developed a workplace procedure to assist department colleagues manage placements and currently work with a number of local organisations including Southern Regional College Armagh, Appleby Trust, Steppingstones NI alongside the Labour Market Partnership (LMP), Clanrye Group/SRC (Employ me) as well as directly with schools and currently facilitate 8 work placements.

We also work with Employers for Disability NI in relation to advice and support and have partnered with USEL

Through the Labour Market Partnership (LMP) we also offer specific Disability employment programmes.

***You also said:***

You commented on areas which we do not have direct responsibility for including housing, access to services in rural areas and community transport as well as mental health issues.

***We did:***

In accordance with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 the Council will continue to have due regard to the social and economic needs of those living in rural areas when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and when designing and delivering services.

We also shared these issues with our colleagues in The Community Planning Team.

**Equality:**

A section 75 monitoring questionnaire was included on the consultation hub as part of the consultation exercise. 12% of respondents were male, 86% female. Responses were received from all of the section 75 age categories with the exception of the 0–15year age group. 26.5% of respondents cared for a disabled child and 26.5% also for other dependent children. 32% stated that they have a disability noting long-term health condition, physical disability, sensory disability, or mental health condition.

The comments received in relation to the equality screening exercise suggest that a small number of respondents have queried both the Council's willingness and ability to address issues relating to the nine equality groups. However, in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the Council will continue to assess the impact of its policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations and take appropriate action where necessary.

**Rural Needs Impact:**

In terms of the Rural Needs Impact, we were able to engage with 17 rural consultees via a rural community group. In accordance with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 the Council will continue to have due regard to the social and economic needs of those living in rural areas when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and when designing and delivering services.