

Executive**On 20th December 2005**Report Title: **Communicating with People with Learning Disabilities**Report of: **Director of Social Services**Wards(s) affected: **All**

Report for:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To seek approval from Members to agree the strategy known as 'Communication Strategy - Adults with Learning Disabilities'

2. Introduction by Executive Member

It is essential that as a council we understand how best to communicate with people with Learning Disabilities, ensuring that through effective communication they have access to information and advice about the range of services and facilities available in Haringey Council. A consistent approach to how we communicate with adults with learning difficulties will ensure they have better access to services and receive a better quality of service. Not only is this in line with the Council's Community Strategy April 2003 – 2007 but it also meets the principle of inclusion that Haringey has gained a reputation for delivering effectively.

This strategy will ensure that

- staff who work directly with people with learning disabilities, reception and customer service staff, receive training in communicating effectively
- members of the public are able to access an easy to understand version of any council publication
- when we write to people with learning disabilities we use pictures, symbols and a different type-face as outlined in the guidelines.
- we develop individual communication passports for people with severe learning disabilities and little or no speech

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Members agree that the strategy attached as Appendix 1 is adopted for all services, and that this will form part of the Corporate Communications Strategy.

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4. Executive Summary

4.1 How we communicate with people with Learning Disabilities is probably the most important factor in how we as a local authority provide information and services to one of the most marginalised groups in our community.

In addition since the publication of the Government's white paper, "*Valuing People*" there has been an expectation that organisations working with people with learning disabilities develop policies to improve communication.

Although there has been some attempts to improve how the Council communicates with people with learning disabilities in some service settings there has not been a consistent whole council approach.

The policy proposes a number of recommendations in relation to the use of symbols and photographs, style of language and developing individual plans.

Implementation of these plans is complex and it will be necessary to phase in these proposals with a target date of April 2007 for full implementation.

A corporate implementation group will be setup to oversee the implementation of these proposals.

5. Reasons for any change in policy or for new policy development (if applicable)

5.1 The white paper "*Valuing People*" expects organisations who work with learning disabilities to have consistent guidelines in place.

In addition, this strategy will assist the Council in reaching many hard to reach communities.

6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

6.1 Valuing People – A new strategy for Learning Disabilities

6.2 To inspect these papers or discuss this report please contact Marina Tsakiridou or Suna Halil as indicated above

7. Background

7.1 Following the agreement of our local response to the Government's white paper "*valuing people*", a communication plan group was set up as a sub group of the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board.

The purpose of this group is to devise a clear strategy to meet the communication needs of Haringey residents who have a learning disability in a consistent way. The Group has included, staff from the Learning Disabilities Partnership, Communication Unit, schools, local services, advocacy organisations together with service users and carers.

7.2 A pilot project was undertaken. This involved delivering communication awareness training and developing appropriate means of communication for people where speech is not their preferred means of communication, they are also working on making documents accessible.

The pilot revealed that there was a general low level of awareness and knowledge of communication issues that caused a lot of confusion and distress. In addition there was very little evidence that the application had any consistent approach.

8. Description

8.1 The strategy includes the following proposals

- That all staff who work directly with people with learning disabilities, including reception and customer service staff, receive training in the delivery of this strategy. This will cover:
 - **Communication Awareness** - targeted for all people who work directly with people with a learning disability and other staff working in the authority who may have regular contact; for example, customer services, reception staff.
 - **Advanced Communication Training** - for staff who wish to become champions or facilitators.
 - **Making Information Clear and Easy to Understand** - for staff involved in the production of documents that people will receive.
 - **Makaton Signing Training** - for all staff who may work with somebody whose preferred communication is not speech.
- That members of the public are able to access an easy to understand version of any council publication and this is included in the language panel.
- That when we write to people with learning disabilities we use pictures, symbols and a different type-face as outlined in the guideline.
- That we develop individual communication passports for people with severe learning disabilities and little or no speech.

- 8.2 All Services will need to consider how changes are made to their core business processes to deliver this policy and to work with staff to achieve the necessary culture change. It is therefore proposed that implementation of this complex change is phased in and a target date for completion is set as April 2007. A corporate working group will manage the implementation plan and monitor and evaluate its effectiveness.
- 8.3 The proposed strategy is attached as Appendix 1 and includes guidelines for staff that will be updated from time to time. An accessible version of the policy will be produced and published using these guidelines once the strategy is agreed.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 Service users, parents, carers and staff across the Partnership have been consulted during the development of the policy and procedures. Drafts of the strategy have been presented in various service user fora and consultation events. Concerns and preferences have been incorporated into the final documents.

The strategy was discussed twice at the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board, which includes representatives from the voluntary and independent sectors.

The strategy has been presented to different staff forums and people had opportunity to contribute their comments and suggestions.

The Communication Plan Delivery Group that oversaw the work on strategy includes representatives from service users, parents/carers, schools, Haringey Teaching Primary Care Trust, managers of Learning Disabilities Partnership, Communications Unit, voluntary and independent sectors.

10. Summary and Conclusions

- 10.1 Through the implementation of this strategy we will be able to ensure a consistent approach to how we communicate with people with learning disabilities.

The setting up of a corporate group to oversee these proposals will enable us to ensure that the guidelines are mainstreamed into everyday use.

11. Comments of the Director of Finance

- 11.1 The direct cost associated with this project is £7,000 as follows;

- Communication Awareness Training – costing £700
- Advanced Communication Training – costing £600
- Making Information Clear Training – costing £150
- Makaton Signing Training - costing £5,500
- There may be costs associated with translation and extra printing which will be contained within services

This will all be funded from the LDDF (Learning Disabilities Development Fund, funded by the TPCT), which has a budget of £40k to fund the communication project.

12. Comments of the Head of Legal Services

12.1 The legal position is accurately reflected in the Appendix to the report which will facilitate the discharge of the Council's duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

13. Equalities Implications

The strategy will be monitored to ensure that it is used consistently for all service users.

The strategy has been also written in a clear and easy to understand version for people with mild to moderate learning disabilities. The strategy recognises the diversity of people with learning disabilities and emphasises that communication underpins everything we do. The documents will be available in community languages and other accessible formats upon request.

By making the document accessible for people with learning disabilities, it is made accessible for a wider population in our community (i.e. people that English is not their first language), thus contributing to the Council's first priority 'Improve Services' through actively reinforcing equal access to services.

14. Comments of Head of IT

Central IT Services have worked with the Learning Disabilities team to assess the IT software required to enable to deliver the strategy. The software has been approved. The Tech Refresh team are packaging it for the new environment.

15. Use of Appendices / Tables / Photographs

15.1 Appendix 1

Communication Strategy Adults with Learning Disabilities