

**REPORT TO: EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
20 NOVEMBER 2006**

**REPORT ON: ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY 2006-2009**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

**REPORT NO: 663-2006**

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report seeks approval for the Education Department's second Accessibility Strategy, covering the period 2006-2009. This is the successor strategy to that approved by Committee on 18 August 2003 (report No. 549-2003). The preparation of the strategy is a duty placed on all education authorities under the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002.

(Copies available in Councillors' Lounge and with Group Secretaries)

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- i. approve the Accessibility Strategy for implementation in all Dundee schools; and
- ii. instruct the Director of Education to monitor carefully the implementation of the strategy, ensuring that it remains compatible with other corporate and health plans.

## **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 The full financial cost of this proposal can be met from ring-fenced funding within the Education Departments Revenue budget.

## **4.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 These developments will extend support to improve access to the skills, knowledge and information needed to enable pupils with disabilities to play a full part in society.

4.2 This second strategy also addresses the duties of the Department in meeting the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Acts of 1995 and 2005 and supports the Council's comprehensive response to the implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.

## **5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Meeting the Council's new duty under the legislation will assist with more accessible educational establishments and services, which meet the needs of all abilities. A FULL Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is not required as screening identifies low adverse impact. The report will have a positive impact on the key themes of equal opportunities.

## **6.0 BACKGROUND**

- 6.1 Education authorities have a duty under the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002 to prepare and implement accessibility strategies to improve, over time, access to education for pupils, and prospective pupils, with disabilities. This strategy covers the period 2006-2009.
- 6.2 The Education Department set up a planning group comprising staff and pupil representatives from the department and schools, from other relevant departments in the Council, and from appropriate external partners representing health and parent groups, to develop the first strategy.
- 6.3 The overriding goals of the legislation are to ensure that disabled pupils, irrespective of their disability, are treated no less favourably in schools, and that all reasonable steps are taken to avoid placing them at any disadvantage. It is the aim of the Accessibility Strategy to achieve these goals in three distinct areas: access to the physical environment; access to the curriculum; and communication with pupils with disabilities.
- 6.4 Since 1996 the Education Department has audited provision for disabled pupils in all mainstream primary and secondary schools, and as a result has had a rolling programme of adaptations to ensure barrier-free or accessibility status. At April 2006, 25% of mainstream establishments, including the nursery sector, were deemed to be barrier-free, i.e. the buildings were fully accessible.
- 6.5 The multi-agency Accessibility Strategy Planning and Review Group carried out an audit on all schools in Dundee in relation to locally defined basic accessibility criteria and has been commissioning building works on a rolling basis in order to increase the number of schools which conforms to that basic level of public access.
- 6.6 In addition, strategies and policies in recent years have been approved which have greatly improved access to the curriculum for pupils with disabilities such as autistic spectrum disorder and sensory impairments. These strategies have included the provision of necessary resources, including staff and specialist equipment.

## **7.0 PROPOSALS**

- 7.1 The Executive fully recognises the enormity of the task facing Councils in fully achieving the goals of the legislation, and therefore expects Councils to put in place short-term, medium-term and long-term action plans.
- 7.2 Under the Disability Discrimination Acts of 1995 and 2005, the Department must meet general and specific duties namely:
  - not to treat disabled pupils less favourably; and
  - to take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage and to have regard for
    - the need to promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons and
    - the need to take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons
- 7.4 It is proposed that the planning group should remain established with a wider remit to meet the legislative requirements both in terms of (i) the original report to monitor the implementation of the first strategy and simultaneously to plan the succeeding strategy for the period 2009-2012 and (ii) to ensure that the Department meets its requirements under the Disability Discrimination Acts noted above.
- 7.5 In order to reflect that change, it is proposed that the group will have a wider representative membership and be re-designated the Access and Inclusion Advisory Group reporting directly to the Senior Management Team through the Head of Support for Learning.
- 7.6 The Department's Good Practice Guide was published under the previous strategy. A key aspect of the new strategy is that this document be updated to reflect changes in legislation and the introduction of new building regulations in the interim period. Thus the Guide will continue to assist

property officers and school managers by establishing the criteria to be considered in any maintenance or repair discussions.

- 7.7 As well as ongoing school audits, the Department will continue to take account of the needs of individual children from their earliest contact with education, and will endeavour to ensure that they are able to attend their local school at all stages.

## **8.0 CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 This report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Depute Chief Executive (Finance), and the Depute Chief Executive (Support Services).

## **9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

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03 November 2006