



Comhairle Cathrach na Gaillimhe
Galway City Council

**Disability Act 2005
Implementation Plan
2007-2009**

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PART ONE

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out how Galway City Council intends to make its services, facilities, information and employment opportunities accessible to all, in line with its obligations as outlined in the Disability Act, 2005 and the Sectoral Plan prepared by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and approved by the Oireachtas. The Sectoral Plan (at par.4.3) requires each local authority to prepare an implementation plan, setting out the manner in which it will meet its commitments and objectives, and the implementation plan has been prepared in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Local Government Management Services Board, and having regard to the Code of Practice on Accessible Public Services, prepared by the National Disability Authority (NDA).

The implementation plan is not only about meeting our legal obligations – it is also about developing and being guided by an approach which reflects our ethos and core values as set out in our Corporate Plan, 2004-2009. These values include:

“The promotion of access for all. As signatories to the Barcelona Declaration, we are committed to making Galway an accessible city, and to working with others to achieve this goal” [p.28]

“A successful city is an inclusive one, in which everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in daily life and to share in the city’s prosperity” [p.30]

Through these statements, Galway City Council acknowledges and asserts the rights of people with disabilities to be treated as equals and to have the same opportunities to participate in, and contribute to the life and development of the city.

They also reflect our commitment to the principles and aims of the Barcelona Declaration, which Galway City Council signed in May 2002. The Declaration was signed by the elected members of the Council on the recommendation of the City Manager and officials, and since that date, the Council has, in consultation and association with local people with disabilities and their representatives, undertaken a range of measures to ensure that,

internally, our staff received sufficient training and awareness-raising to give accessibility appropriate priority in our policies and programmes, and externally, we develop and deliver programmes to make the city accessible. This has laid the groundwork for what is required to meet our obligations under the Disability Act, but we acknowledge that we are still at a relatively early stage, and that much remains to be done to achieve the goal of an accessible city.

2.0 Approach

Given the importance attached to access and disability issues in its Corporate Plan, it follows that Galway City Council's approach to these issues would involve the elected Council, and all of its staff. Internally, a cross-departmental team which was established following the signing of the Barcelona Declaration, and which is chaired by the Director of Corporate Services, meets quarterly to develop action plans and targets, review progress and identify issues or barriers to improving access. The team includes the Council's Building Control Officer, its Access Project Officer, and a nominee of the Workplace Partnership Committee, as well as representatives from the service Departments.

The Chair brings progress reports and relevant issues to the Council's Senior Management Team, and submits periodic reports [i.e. two –three times yearly] to the full elected Council.

The elected members are consulted in advance of any annual or long-term action plan being finalised, they monitor progress through consideration of the periodic reports, they ensure that, in preparing and approving the annual Budget, adequate resources are provided to fund the action plan, and as individuals, they are encouraged to bring issues and suggestions relating to accessibility to the Chair of the in-house team.

When the annual plans are agreed, and responsibility for delivering the actions therein has been assigned, the actions are incorporated into the annual business plans of the relevant Departments and the Team Development Plans of the relevant Departmental teams. This ensures that, as envisaged in the Performance Management and Development Systems [PMDS] model introduced in all local authorities in 2006, the objectives and goals set out in the Corporate Plan are operationalised and acted

upon through the annual business plans and team development plans which link these objectives and goals to the work undertaken by every member of the Council's staff. It is also intended that the Council's newly established Social Inclusion Unit will play a key role in supporting the implementation of this Plan and of any other accessibility measures throughout the organisation.

The City Council also decided in 2005 to focus on the specific issues relating to employment opportunities in the Council for people with disabilities. The Council leads an inter-agency working group, established under the remit of the Social Inclusion Group of Galway City Development Board, which has consulted widely with people with disabilities in Galway, and their representative groups, has identified a number of barriers and policy issues to be addressed, and has focussed on increasing training and employment opportunities in public sector organisations in the city.

A central element in the Council's approach is to secure the active participation of people with disabilities and their representative groups, in developing and delivering the implementation plan. At one level, it is evident that many people with disabilities have been confined to the margins of society, and in the context of social inclusion, the Council considers it important, not only that the facilities, services and amenities of the city be accessible to people with disabilities, but that access to, and participation in the Councils decision making process be available, so that this community can exert real influence over decisions and policies which affect them. In more specific terms, the Council recognises the depth of experience of access issues which people with disabilities have accumulated over time, and it acknowledges the value of ensuring that this experience informs our approach to identifying priority issues and developing appropriate responses to them.

To this end, the Council has been liaising with the Access For All Group in relation to the process of identifying priorities, and ensuring that actions and initiatives are both appropriate and effective. The Access For All Group acts as an independent umbrella group for people with disabilities, but it is important to note that the liaison process is not exclusive, and that the Council welcomes input from any group or individual regarding issues of access or accessibility. It is also accepted that full and effective implementation of the Act and the Sectoral Plan requires that the Council has the capacity to deliver the appropriate actions and

initiatives. The most sustainable approach is to develop this capacity in-house, and in this regard, it is envisaged that training and awareness raising from our staff will comprise an ongoing element in the implementation plan.

Finally, in line with the spirit of the Disability Act, and in the interests of social inclusion, the preferred approach of the Council, in as much as it is practical, is to facilitate access for people with disabilities to mainstream services, and it is envisaged that separate services would only be provided where it is established that access to mainstream services is not practicable.

3.0 Access Auditing

The Council has to date commissioned audits of its office accommodation in City Hall, together with its recreational facilities in Leisureland and the Town Hall Theatre. Specific issues arise in the Town Hall Theatre, due primarily to the fact that it is a very old building. The other audits highlighted the importance of accommodating the needs of all groups, including those with hearing or visual impairments, and the Council has undertaken a number of minor remedial works to address the issues raised. With regard to audits generally, it is noted that the potential contribution of audits to improving access is largely influenced by two factors:

(a) The availability of accredited expertise – it is noted that, while a certain level of expertise is available in the private sector, there is no accredited access auditing course available in Ireland. This issue will need to be addressed, particularly if the objective of developing appropriate in-house expertise in local authorities and other public sector organisations is to be achieved.

(b) The availability of clear and unambiguous statutory standards for access – those are effectively provided by the Building Regulations in relation to buildings, and it is obviously desirable that similar standards be put in place in relation to external public spaces and facilities.

In Galway City Council, staff members in key Departments have received training in access auditing, and the Council has also received valuable input and assistance from people with

disabilities themselves in undertaking audits. Our long-term objective is to ensure that sufficient in-house auditing capacity is available in the City Council, but, as stated above, this will depend primarily on the availability of appropriate training.

4.0 Consultation

In preparing its Implementation Plan, the Council is conscious of the need to ensure that, as far as possible, the plan will deliver real and tangible improvements in access to services and facilities. In this regard, the Action Matrix attached to this Plan reflects the priority issues identified by the Access for All Group, and the Council will continue to consult with those who use our services, with specific emphasis on people with disabilities and their representatives. The Council will also continue to consult with its internal stakeholders – its Access Team, and the management and staff of the Council, and the elected members of the Council.

The Council will also consult with other public service providers, and in particular, the provider of public transport services, in order to ensure that the issue of mobility around the City is adequately addressed, and that there is appropriate consistency regarding the services of different agencies in the City.

Finally, the Council will continue to consult with the members of Galway City Development Board, and in particular, the members of the Social Inclusion Group of the CDB.

It is also our intention to ensure that, in addition to consulting in advance of adapting the Implementation Plan, the Council will be open to ongoing consultation with both service users and providers, in ensuring that progress is made, and that new issues are addressed as they arise.

5.0 Prioritisation Methodology

The City Councils approach to prioritisation is geared towards;

- (a) Reflecting the priorities identified in the Sectoral Plan – i.e. access to City Council buildings, and facilities which are heavily

- used, and upgrading of bus stops on roads where wheelchair accessible buses are in service or being phased in,
- (b) Enabling the Council to fulfil its responsibilities as set out in the Disability Act, and
 - (c) Consulting with people with disabilities and their representatives, as to what they consider to be the type of actions or works which should be prioritised, and the location of the works.

With regard to the latter point, our consultations to date have indicated that the disability groups have identified the upgrading of footpaths and crossings as a priority, and have also indicated the locations where upgrading works would have the most benefit, have regard to the nature of works and the extent of usage. This is reflected in the Action Matrix, which is set out in Part II of this Plan.

Appendix
Action Matrices 2007-2009