

# It's Our Party - Let Us In

By the Party Participation and Disabled People group.

Part One.

16 January 2017.

## 1. Introduction.

1.1. Member organisations with at least 25 members must comply with the Equality Act 2010. This includes each Labour Party branch and CLP as well as every other Party structure. Party structures with at least 25 members must not directly or indirectly discriminate; they must ensure all disabled members are able to participate in decision-making, meetings, events, campaigns and other activities.

1.2. To comply with the Act, Party structures need to identify their disabled members, ask what reasonable adjustments they require and make those adjustments. It is likely the majority of Labour Party structures are currently in breach of the Act.

1.3. Many disabled members are excluded from Party activities, events and decision-making processes. Some have experienced branches refusing direct requests to make reasonable adjustments. Further, elected officers of Party structures have argued against making reasonable adjustments such as online participation at meetings, because they require changes to internal custom and practice.

1.4. Party structures are not routinely asking what reasonable adjustments disabled members require. When discussing what comprises a reasonable adjustment, many elected officers of Party structures do not understand the issue beyond basic physical changes like ramps for wheelchair users. Little, if any, attempt is being made to use technology and the internet to enable people to access their right to participate.

1.5. Many CLPs do not have a Disability Co-ordinator/Officer and there is no equivalent of Party Women's and BAME Forums or Youth Labour.

1.6. Previous Party guidance has attempted to address the Equality Act duties, but this guidance is not being followed. Previous attempts to correct this situation have not succeeded.

1.7. Disability awareness training for elected officers in Party structures is not currently a requirement.

1.8. To comply with the Act elected officers of all Party structures need to be aware of the legal requirements placed on them, and have a good enough working understanding of the ramifications of those requirements.

1.9. Part two of this document, currently being drafted, will provide further information and introduce a number of good practice models.

1.9. In order to tackle stigma, The Labour Party should hold itself to more inclusive standards than current practice in wider society, rather than lagging behind. The authors of this document aim to ensure Labour Party compliance with Equality Act duties, informed by current good practice and past Party guidance, is firmly built into Party rules, guidance, systems and structures. We recognise that the Labour Party, as the party of equality, must take the lead in enabling full participation by disabled members.

### **3. Proposals.**

#### **3.1. Accessibility questionnaire.**

The only way to identify what reasonable adjustments we need to make is to ask disabled members what they require. To comply with the Act, existing disabled members need to be asked in a one off survey whilst new disabled members need to be asked as they join. Elected officers of Party structures can find contact details of their disabled members from the Party membership database.

3.1. If a request is made to make an adjustment to custom or practice that elected officers do not understand, they will need to go back to the individual making the request to discuss their exact requirements and how they can best be provided. Debating whether these adjustments should be made is inappropriate. Consultation is vital, and no elected officer should act on an assumption that they know what is best for anyone.

3.3. Party structures should use the following questionnaire which will be made available in print and online in a format suitable for screen reading software, in plain English and Easy English with images suitable for people with dyslexia or learning difficulties, and as an audio described file:

3.4. Your response to this questionnaire will enable us to meet our duties under in the Equalities Act 2010. Please complete and return to ...

Name:

Membership number:

1. Do you identify as disabled? Yes/No.

2. Do you have an impairment &/or a long term (physical or mental health) concern which impacts on your day-to-day life? Yes/No.

3. Do you have a disabled family member or friend who you live with or provide some assistance to? Yes/No.

4. Are you satisfied with the way we notify you about meetings, events and other activities?

If no, how should we change this?

5. Are you satisfied with the way we provide print and online materials?

If no, how would you prefer us to do this?

6. Are you able to understand and participate in meetings, events and other activities?

If no, what should we do to change this?

7. Are there any other ways we can enable to you participate?

8. If you would like to make any other comments, please add them here:

Any personal information gathered on an individual will be covered by the Data Protection Act 1998 and should be treated as confidential unless otherwise agreed with the individual.

### **3.5. Disability awareness for elected officers of Party structures.**

On being put forward for election all potential elected officers of Party structures should be supplied with Party guidance on compliance with the Equality Act, including these proposals.

3.6. After election, all disability officers, chairs, secretaries and delegates to conference should be required to attend disability awareness training provided by appropriately experienced disabled members so that they can avoid discriminatory actions, omissions or statements.

3.7. An inclusion day, open to all members, should be held each year to provide training and opportunities for debate.

### **3.8. Disability officers.**

3.9. CLP Disability Officer should automatically become CLP Executive members.

3.10. A CLP Disability Officer should have a seat on the NEC, the Officer to be elected by all CLP Disability Officers annually.

### **3.11. Service Audits.**

Elected officers of Party structures to be required to carry out an annual audit of the events, meetings and activities to see how disabled people have been enabled to participate.

3.12. Elected officers to use the results of the audits to make legally required reasonable adjustments.

3.13. Each Party structure to produce an annual report detailing results of Accessibility Questionnaires, audits and reasonable adjustments that have been, or are planned to be, made. These reports to be made available to all members in print and online in a format suitable for screen reading software, in plain English and Easy English with images suitable for people with dyslexia or learning difficulties, and as an audio described file.

### **3.14. Accountability and transparency.**

CLPs to produce annual reports compiled from their branches. These reports to be made available to all members in print and online in a format suitable for screen reading software, in plain English and Easy English with images suitable for people with dyslexia or learning difficulties, and as an audio described file.

3.15 The NEC to produce an annual report compiled from CLP reports and reports of all other structures. This report to be made available to all members in print and online in a format suitable for screen reading software, in plain English and Easy English with images suitable for people with dyslexia or learning difficulties, and as an audio described file.

### **3.16. Campaigning.**

The Party Participation and Disabled People group is campaigning internally – within the Labour Party – for change. It is vital that all Party structures comply with their legal obligations at the very least, and quickly.

3.17. Campaigning is a key activity of CLPs and the Party as a whole. All campaigning activities must be made inclusive and accessible. A model of inclusive and accessible campaigning needs to be produced and used by all Party structures, Volume Two of this document will include a model. There is the resource, talent and skill set within our movement to be innovative in our approach.

3.18. When these proposals are bedded into the Party, we will be in a position to use our experience of implementing good practice to strengthen our position on equalities and campaign on a firmer footing.

## **4. About the authors.**

4.1. The Party Participation and Disabled People group includes Disability Officers from the following CLPs:

Chipping Barnet CLP: **Reema Patel.**

Eltham CLP: **Caroline Walsh.**

Islington South & Finsbury CLP: **David Hooke.**

Vauxhall CLP: **Alex Bigham.**

Warrington South CLP: **Sarah-Jane Dean.**

Wokingham CLP: **Rona Lisa Topaz** (Women's Officer - the CLP has no disabilities officer).

4.2. **Sarah-Jane Brownlie** is a disabled disability anti-poverty businesswoman. On the way to having the first unionized care & employment service in SW London paying the real living wage in support of London waiting & introducing a universal basic income to disabled families in Africa. She is a disability confident trainer for businesses. For the past 20 years she has been a voluntary independent advocate for disabled people with specialties in social security benefits, personal budgets, mental health & autism.

4.3. **Alison Dunning** is a university research scientist who became disabled 4 years ago. Her employer made the necessary adjustments for her to continue working and she frequently gives seminars and chairs international meetings from home, via the internet. She is increasingly active as an equality and diversity rep in her workplace. Although she continues as a Labour Party Branch Sec, she cannot access CLP meetings and so has little or no voice at that level.

4.4. **David Hooke** is Disability Officer for Islington South & Finsbury CLP and a professionally qualified IT Systems Administrator.

**4.5. Sophie Talbot** left her career as a community and organisation development specialist in 2004 because of her disability. Prior to that she was London Economic Development Strategy Manager and Mainstreaming Equalities Manager for European Structural Funds in London. She is now a part-time disability and dyslexia library assistant at Birkbeck University and runs a small business, [cookiewp.com](http://cookiewp.com).

**4.6. Rona Topaz** is a singer, actress, vocal coach for The Rock Academy Foundation and Primavolta and choir leader for the Dramatize and Sing and Mingle choirs. She is also a qualified Parliamentary Outreach trainer and Women's Officer for Wokingham CLP.

**4.5. Caroline Walsh** has over 20 years experience of research and policy development at international, national and local levels. She has worked on projects at UNEP and World Bank and research projects influencing British Council, EU and UK-wide policy decision-making. She has extensive knowledge of the Labour Movement and policy formulation as well as experience of EU policy formation.

## 5. Contact details.

5.1. Sarah-Jane Dean, Disability Officer, Warrington South CLP.

[disabilityofficerws@gmail.com](mailto:disabilityofficerws@gmail.com).

5.2. Ruth Middleton, Harrogate and Knaresborough CLP Membership Officer / Vice Chair.

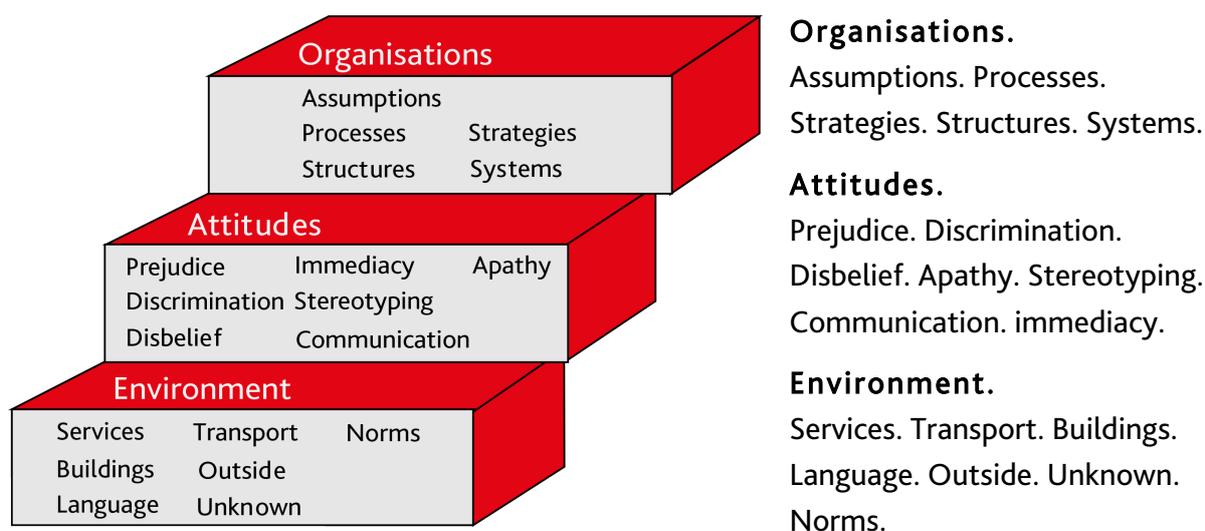
[ruthmiddleton@btinternet.com](mailto:ruthmiddleton@btinternet.com).

5.3. Sophie Talbot, facilitator of the Party Participation and Disabled People group,

Caledonian Ward (Islington South & Finsbury) member. [sophie@cookiewp.com](mailto:sophie@cookiewp.com).

## 6. Appendix One: the social model of disability.

Before reaching a starting line for equality, society places a variety of barriers in the way of people with physical or mental health conditions:



## **7. Appendix 2: further reading.**

### **7.1. Disability Access and Provision of Services – Labour Party 2007.**

<http://bit.ly/disabilityaccess2007>.

### **7.2. Improving accessibility handbook – Labour Party 2007.**

<http://bit.ly/improvingaccessibility2007>.

Produced by the Labour Party Disabled Members Group whose website, Labourability, is now defunct.

### **7.3. The Equality Act 2010.**

<http://bit.ly/theequalityact2010>.

### **7.4. CLP Accessibility Guide – Labour Party.**

Possibly published in 2014, possibly not published.

<http://bit.ly/accessibilityguide2014>.

### **7.5. Disability Equality Roadshow consultation 2016 to 2017.**

<http://bit.ly/der2017>.