

IRS Disability Equality Progress Report

Introduction

The Independent Review Service publishes a Disability Equality Scheme. As part of this scheme we produce an action plan and this report sets out the progress we have made in relation to the plan.

Progress

1. We published our Disability Equality Scheme, which includes a Disability Equality Action Plan, on our website, in December 2009.
2. We have continued to develop links with individuals and organisations in order to help us achieve our objectives under the scheme. Contacts are ongoing and have recently included groups such as Help the Aged, Age Concern England, MIND, the Disability Alliance, the Sainsbury's Centre for Mental Health, Citizens Advice, welfare rights groups, and Members of Parliament.
3. We have continued to provide training for our staff to improve the service we deliver and to heighten their understanding of issues facing diverse groups. Recently, training has included: asthma awareness training, data security training, telephone training, and human rights training, as well as training on various aspects of decision making.
4. We undertook a survey of staff ethnicity and disability in 2009/2010 and provided assessments for disabled staff where appropriate. We conduct regular health and safety assessments to ensure that our working environment is as safe as possible for disabled people.
5. We have put in place new procedures for the evacuation of disabled visitors during an emergency and to ensure that relevant staff are on notice to provide assistance should an emergency arise.
6. We have undertaken an evaluation of our translation, braille, language line and mini-com services. We have found that these are generally working well. But we have decided to clarify procedures for staff and to heighten awareness of the availability of these services amongst staff and customers. We have also improved our service by replacing our mini-com with a textphone service.
7. We put in place measures to monitor the ethnicity, age, gender and disability of staff applying for training and promotion.

8. We continue to issue our general customer survey form. We analyse the results and link them with our monitoring of age, gender and ethnicity. Results are published in the Social Fund Commissioner's Annual Report. We take account of feedback from all sources when deciding how to improve the service that we deliver.
9. We have been exploring the possibility of introducing more frequent disability monitoring in conjunction with our ethnic monitoring process; and plan to introduce more frequent monitoring in 2011.
10. The IRS' External Complaints Panel provides independent scrutiny of our complaints handling process. The members of the panel have been made aware of our equality duties and have been asked to consider them when reviewing cases. To date the panel has not raised any concerns.

Independent Review Service