

Disability Action Plan

Co/ownership

April 2022

Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association Limited



Disability Action Plan

To promote positive attitudes towards disabled people

To encourage the participation of disabled people in Public Life

April 2022

Please note that this document is available on request in alternative formats and/or other languages.

Please contact:

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1.0 Introduction

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), NI Co- Ownership Housing Association Ltd (Co-Ownership) is required when carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life (“the disability duties”)

Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, Co-Ownership is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a disability action plan showing how it proposes to fulfil these duties in relation to its functions.

2.0 Commitment

Co-Ownership is committed to implementing effectively its disability duties and this disability action plan. We will allocate all necessary resources in terms of people, time and money in order to implement effectively this plan and where appropriate, build objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into corporate and annual operating plans.

We will also put appropriate internal arrangements in place to ensure that the disability duties are complied with and this disability action plan effectively implemented. We will ensure the effective communication of the plan to staff and to providing all necessary training and guidance for staff on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.

We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual report to the Equality Commission on the implementation of this plan as well as carrying out a five yearly review of this plan.

Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating this disability action plan and the point of contact within Co-Ownership will be:-

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If you require this plan in an alternative format and/or a different language, please contact the person above to discuss your requirements.

A copy of this plan, our annual progress to the Equality Commission and our five year review of this plan will be made available on our website at www.co-ownership.org

3.0 Consultation

Co-Ownership is committed to carrying out consultation in the development of its disability duties. We are keen to seek the views of disabled people in relation to this plan. To do this, Co-Ownership will be engaged on a number of levels:

- We will inform all staff through our Staff Corporate briefings and our staff shared drive on the development of this plan; and
- We will publish our plan through our website.

Through our consultation Co-Ownership has and will continue to:

- Identify the barriers faced by disabled people in participating in public life in general and specifically any barriers they may encounter or have encountered in relation to their dealings with the Co-Ownership;
- Identify opportunities for the Co-Ownership to promote positive attitudes;
- Review processes and policies which may pose a barrier to disabled people accessing Co-Ownership services or participating in public life;
- Set priorities and identify opportunities for encouraging participation in public life; and
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures taken and the proposals outlined in the Plan.

4.0 Functions

Co-Ownership is Northern Ireland's regional body for shared ownership and the organisation that runs the Co-Ownership Scheme. It was established in 1978 and is a registered housing association and an industrial and provident society. It is also a charity registered with the Northern Ireland Charities Commission. Co-Ownership is regulated and partly funded by the Department for Communities (DfC).

Our aim

The main aim of Co-Ownership is to promote and sustain the concept of shared ownership in Northern Ireland mainly as a means of facilitating home ownership. For over 40 years it has been the cornerstone of government's affordable housing initiative, assisting mainly first-time buyers and also returning home buyers in Northern Ireland to get on to the housing ladder. It has been very successful to date, having helped to provide over 31,500 homes of which over 21,500 households have moved on from Co-Ownership.

Co-Ownership's purpose is to enable people to become homeowners. Our vision is to lead the way on affordable home ownership. Our values are

- Putting Customers First
- Working together
- Doing the right thing
- Evolving and improving.

Co-Ownership product

Our main product is Co-Own in which a customer buys a share in a home, depending on how much they can afford. This is between 50-90% of the purchase price. Co-Ownership buys the remaining share in the property and the customer can increase their share at any stage until they own it outright. There can be several reasons why someone who aspires to home ownership cannot achieve this. It could be because of obstacles like a lack of deposit or affordability issues. Co-Ownership can help such persons.

Rent to Own product

Co-Ownership launched our Rent to Own product in April 2016. Operated by our subsidiary, OwnCo Homes Limited, this is a product for people who aspire to buy a home but aren't yet ready to do so. Since 2016 we have helped 72 households move into new build homes, which they rent for up to three years with an option to buy the home after one year.

Co-Own for Over 55s

Co-Ownership has been allocated funding to launch its offering called Co-Own for Over 55s to assist our ageing population to find accommodation suitable to their needs. The issue may be that a person's current home may not have the monetary value they need to move to another, more suitable home. Co-Own for Over 55s offers them an opportunity to move to more suitable accommodation by bridging the gap between the equity in their home (or savings) and the cost of the new home.

The Board of Management of Co-Ownership membership comprises the Chair and up to 11 other members appointed under the terms set out in the Code of Governance. The Board made up of non-executive directors, reflects a range of interests, representing the interests of users of the service.

The functions of Co-Ownership for the purposes of the Order include its powers and duties in connection with:

- Customer Services
- Customer Operations
- Product Development
- Legal
- Governance
- Finance, Procurement & Arrears
- Marketing & PR
- IT
- Human Resources
- Consultants/contractors/suppliers

5.0 Public Life Positions

The range of public life positions over which Co-Ownership has responsibility for, is -

- Board members of Co-Ownership

6.0 Previous Measures

Outlined below are the key measures which Co-Ownership has already taken to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

- Disability awareness training for our staff
- Provision of a corporate website with ReachDeck for hearing impaired
- Provision of an E-Learning Academy with built in accessibility features
- Workplace policies which support work/life balance and reasonable adjustments
- Recruitment and Selection policies which appoint applicants on the basis of merit
- Policies and procedures to identify and help vulnerable customers
- Accessible corporate publications
- Staff training and awareness raising regarding promotion of access to services and information
- All Co-Ownership policies are screened in line with Section 75 requirements
- Benchmarking against other relevant organisations to ensure best practice is incorporated into our ways of working

7.0 Action Measures

Outlined below are the measures we propose to take over the period of this disability from April 2022 to March 2027.

7.1 How the Plan will be published

Following submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, this Plan will be available by contacting:

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Website: www.co-ownership.org

The plan can be accessed on Co-Ownership's website (web address above).

The plan will be produced in clear print and plain language and will be available in alternative formats on request for people who speak a minority language.

An electronic copy of the Plan will be placed on our staff accessible drive to read or print as required.

7.2 Proposed Measures

The measures which we propose to take over the period of this revised Disability Action Plan are outlined in Appendix 1, together with performance indicators and targets.

Co-Ownership is committed to monitoring and reviewing policies and practices to ensure that disability equality duties are being met. Monitoring the progress of this Plan will be incorporated into the reporting systems on equality issues. Senior management will be informed of progress as part of the annual review process.

We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual progress report on the implementation of this plan to the Equality Commission and to carrying out a review of the plan.

The annual review of the Plan will also form part of the monitoring and review process and assist in drafting appropriate targets and key performance indicators for the next year.

Appendix 1: Proposed Measures

Measures to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

Measure		Timescale	Performance Indicators/Targets
1.	Training on general Disability Equality Awareness - delivered to all Staff and Board including senior managers, human resources and new recruits as part of the induction process	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will train our staff to be aware of our responsibilities under the Disability Duties and key functions of our DAP. • We will provide our Board members with training related to our S75 duties and disability duties. • We will train our policy writers to be aware of the challenges and considerations of disabled people when writing and screening new policies and procedures. • We will train and coach our managers on good practice surrounding recruitment and selection, incorporating disability etiquette. • We will continue to include our S75 and disability duties in our Corporate Induction for all staff.
2.	Assess and improve accessibility of website	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will keep under review the website and seek feedback on user experience that could be improved.
3.	Update operational policies in respect of	Normally 3 yearly for policy review and adhoc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing policy review programme.

	people with disabilities	as required due to legislative/procedural changes	
4.	Review communication policies, practices and procedures to ensure compliance with disability duties	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will review promotional materials to ensure that we portray disabled people as representative of our staff and customers. • We will include a welcoming statement for job applicants who identify as having a disability. • We will include more diverse pictures in our recruitment advertising to reflect older workers and workers with a visible disability. • We will take account of disabilities when developing policies and procedures to ensure we are promoting positive attitudes to people with a disability. • We will continue to provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates who have applied for a job role with us. • We will reimburse reasonable travel costs for job applicants with a disability who travel to attend interview.
5.	Access to our customer reception area		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a result of moving office, our customers now have lift access on to our customer reception area on floor 1 of Moneda House.
6.	Digitisation of our Applications process	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will keep under review the digitisation of the applications process to ensure

			compliance with disability duties.
7.	Engage with staff to highlight the need to keep HR informed of any disability issues	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will continue to educate our staff on our commitment to recognising disabilities and we will put in place reasonable adjustments to allow them to remain in work. • Provide information materials to our staff which relate to specific disabilities/long term health conditions.
8.	Support staff with disabilities	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will continue to use our occupational health provider to ensure we provide practical solutions to reasonable adjustments that work for the person. • We will continue to encourage managers to see disability not as a obstacle to working life but as something that simply requires more understanding and thought. • Keep under monitor our building and adjustments that may alleviate issues for disabled persons or improve access for disabled persons.
9.	Regular reporting to Senior Team and Board on implementation of disability duties	Ongoing annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least annually and through Annual Report submitted to ECNI.
10.	Include an update in the annual Equality report to the Equality Commission on progress under this action plan	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report submitted to ECNI.

11.	Update Equality Commission on any changes to the action plan	On-going/as and when necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated action plan submitted to ECNI.
12.	Encourage disabled people's participation in public life	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will use a welcoming statement when recruiting our Board members to encourage applicants who identify as having a disability. • We will provide minutes/board papers in an appropriate alternative format to meet the needs of our Board members e.g. larger print. • We will take into consideration locations which are easily accessible to Board members with any additional mobility needs when holding meetings off site. • We will reimburse travel expenses for Board members to attend meetings/events in particular where they need additional mobility assistance. • When holding customer events, we will provide clear signage, promotional materials, make visitors aware of access and facilities.

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