

5. DISABILITY ISSUES

Officer responsible Director of Policy	Author Margaret Macadam
Corporate Plan Output: Policy Advice	

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to develop a disability policy for Council.

BACKGROUND

This discussion of issues affecting people with disabilities has arisen out of a research project commissioned by the Council's Leisure Unit last year to evaluate the future direction of the KiwiAble Programme¹. In the course of the study issues were raised regarding the Council's position on disability in general. Representatives from the wider disability community have therefore approached the Council with a recommendation on how to address these issues.

DEFINITIONS

It is important to provide definitions of some key terms, in particular, "disability", and "people with disabilities", as they are used in this report.

The traditional view of disability is known as the "medical" model. According to this model, a person with an impairment is seen as being disabled by that impairment. Disability is seen as an issue which needs to be addressed at the individual level. More recently, there has come to be a growing acceptance that this model does not accurately reflect the social and environmental context of disability. In the social model of disability, it is recognised that people with impairments are disabled by social, attitudinal or physical barriers. The Government's Policy on Disability Issues reflects this approach, in its aim to "provide the legal rights, resources and support necessary to empower people with disabilities to overcome the barriers to participation in their communities and to achieve their full potential as individuals."

Whilst acknowledging the disabling impact of social and environmental factors, it is nevertheless necessary to define the group of people who may experience these barriers. Statistics New Zealand, in its 1996/7 Disability Surveys, defines disability as any limitation in activity resulting from a long-term condition or health problem, lasting or expected to last six months or more. Its focus is not on the nature of the disorder or disabling condition, but rather the limitation resulting from it. It defines several main types of disability, including physical, sensory, and intellectual disabilities, acknowledging that any individual may fit into one or more of these groups. Since these are the definitions on which the latest available statistics are based, it seems appropriate (for reasons of consistency) to use them, at least as a starting point.

¹ This programme aims to promote people with disabilities into sport and recreation.

ISSUES RAISED BY THE KIWIABLE REVIEW

The research conducted by the Leisure Unit found that the KiwiAble Co-ordinator is currently acting informally as a consultant/adviser to other units within Council on issues affecting people with disabilities (for example access to buildings and public spaces), and deals with enquiries from outside the Council on these matters. This suggests that there is a lack of knowledge of disability issues in some areas of the Council's work. The research concluded that this informal role could not continue, as it compromises the co-ordinator's time and expertise (see Appendix for details of the mission statement and objectives of the KiwiAble Co-ordinator's role). There is also a perception that Council processes for consulting with the disability community on Council issues (such as roading, public access, etc) are not adequate. Councillor Graham Condon also acts as a consultant to Council Units on occasion.

The thirteen organisations from the disability community who participated in the KiwiAble Review Planning Day² have called on the Council to develop a disability policy to clarify its position with regard to people with disabilities. They also called for a specific strategy to integrate the needs of the disability community into planning which covers:

- Public Transport
- Housing
- Recruitment and Selection
- Council Facilities and Amenities
- Leisure and Community Services
- Physical Access Provision, Building Code Compliance
- Roothing
- Services for Children, Youth and Older Persons
- Education, Training and Employment Initiatives

The group also identified the need for consultation processes which adequately canvass the views of the wider disability community. The appointment of a disability advocate was recommended by participants in the review as the best means of achieving these aims.

² Including Royal NZ Federation for the Blind, IHC, CCS, Parafed Canterbury, the Deaf Association and the Maaori Disability and Resource Centre.

POLICY CONTEXT

Strategic Objective A5 of the Council's 1999 Annual Plan (and in the 2000 draft Annual Plan) is to ensure "that the needs and aspirations of children, youth, elderly and people with disabilities are taken into account in all Council activities". The needs and aspirations of people with disabilities are not addressed by a specific Council policy, although there are policies for the other population groups mentioned in this Objective. According to data from Statistics New Zealand, 20% of the population in New Zealand are people with disabilities (as defined above). In the Southern Region, this proportion rises to 24%. Although there is no breakdown for Christchurch, there is no evidence to suggest that the figure will be lower in this city. If anything the figure might be higher, given the existence in the city of a specialist spinal injuries unit, and the fact that 520 ex-residents of the Templeton Centre (people with intellectual disabilities) have moved into the community over recent years. On issues of population size alone, a disability policy appears to be necessary. There are, however, additional factors that indicate a need for this policy.

The vast majority (96%) of people with disabilities now live in households. In addition to facing social and environmental barriers to participation in community life, people with disabilities are also highly likely to face economic disadvantage. The 1996/7 Disability Surveys show that, amongst adults with disabilities, 63% are either unemployed or not in the workforce, and 60% have a gross personal income of less than \$15,000. Forty-five per cent of adults with disabilities living in households have no educational qualifications. The Council's Community Development and Social Wellbeing Policy provides evidence of its commitment to the principles of equity, social justice, empowerment and engagement. These principles endorse Council action in addressing the social, environmental and economic barriers which people with disabilities face in their attempts to participate in community life. Furthermore, from a human rights perspective, Council needs to have clear processes in place to ensure that there is no risk of discrimination against people with disabilities occurring in any of its future activities.

DISCUSSION

There is a need for Council to clarify its position with regard to its residents with disabilities. There are already areas where Council's commitment to people with disabilities is clear, notably in the KiwiAble programme. A disability policy would formalise Council's commitment by ensuring that:

- All Council services are accessible to people with disabilities
- Consultation processes enable the wider disability community to participate fully in decisions which affect them
- The wider community is educated about and encouraged to remove barriers to participation in "an ordinary life" for people with disabilities

CONCLUSION

The Council has been asked to appoint an advocate for people with disabilities by DPA³ and other groups in the disability sector. Staff are of the opinion that the Council should develop a policy as a first step in addressing the issues outlined in this report. This policy would be developed in consultation with the wider disability community, elected members, Council Units and other stakeholders. The draft policy would be submitted to the Community Services Committee and the Council for endorsement. A strategy would then need to be developed in consultation with the main stakeholders, in order to identify the best approach for achieving the policy's goals. In developing a strategy, the issue of responsibility for its implementation would be addressed, including an assessment of the request to appoint a disability advocate.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Kiwiable reference group be thanked for considering the Council's wider role in disability issues.
 2. That the Committee agrees to develop a disability policy as a first step in addressing the issues outlined in this report.
 3. That the Policy Directorate and the Community Relations Unit work closely with representatives of the disability community in planning and undertaking the necessary consultation and policy development process.
 4. That the issue of the appointment of a disability advocate be addressed as part of the subsequent strategy development process.

Chairman's Recommendation: For discussion.

³ An organisation run by people with disabilities, to lobby for change.