



Title:	Working with Councillors with Disabilities
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Introduction

Elected councillors are at the heart of the local authority. They set the strategy and direction of the council, take the most important decisions and lead and guide the organisation. Councillors do much of their work with individuals and bodies in their communities. However, it is also important for them to take part in council and committee meetings, where policies and priorities can be debated, discussed and decided.

As the democratically elected champions of their communities, councillors have a crucial role in articulating the views of those they represent. Some members will be appointed to particular positions, such as council leader or chairman of a committee. Fylde Council is committed to assisting persons of all backgrounds to stand for election and, if elected, to help each member to be the most effective councillor that they can.

The Local Government Association has been working with a range of local authorities and disabled councillors to encourage more disabled people to seek elected office. As the number of disabled councillors grows, there will be an increasing need for appropriate and timely support. The association has published a [guide](#) to becoming a councillor for people with disabilities.

The Member Development Strategy details the arrangements that have been put in place to help all councillors to carry out their responsibilities. This policy on members with disabilities sets out the arrangements that are in place to assist with the particular needs of councilors who have a disability.

The law

Under the Equality Act 2010, the council has a duty to make reasonable adjustments to make sure that, as far as is reasonable, a disabled councillor has the same access to everything that is involved in carrying out the role of a councillor as a non-disabled councillor does. This may mean the removal of physical barriers, providing extra support or changing the way some things are organised.

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The duty is a positive and proactive one to take steps to remove or reduce or prevent the obstacles a councillor faces.

In addition, as a public body, the council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty. This includes the duty to have regard, in exercising its functions, to the need to advance equality of opportunity between people who are disabled and those who are not. Among other things, this involves encouraging people who are disabled to participate in public life.

Our aims

We aim to comply with the duties in the Equality Act, not just because we have to, but because we need the contributions that disabled people may be able to make as councillors, and because it is good for the make up of councils to reflect the make-up of their communities.

We will put in place actions that will help disabled people who are thinking of standing for election to the council, actions to help us to understand the individual needs of disabled councillors, and, as far as practicable, actions to address those needs.

Actions to help disabled people who may be considering standing for election to the council

We will offer anyone who is disabled and is considering standing for election to the council the chance to discuss with a senior officer how their disability might affect the ways they could serve as a councillor and what adjustments could be made to assist them.

We will signpost any potential candidates who are disabled to other sources of assistance, for example the Government's Access to Elected Office Fund and the Local Government Association.

Actions to help us understand the individual needs of disabled councillors

When a candidate puts in nomination papers to stand for election, we will ask them to briefly indicate whether they have a disability and, if they do, the nature of the disability. This will help us to start thinking early about the adjustments that might need to be put in place if they are disabled and are elected.

We will meet with each newly-elected councilor individually during the induction process following their election. For a disabled councilor, this will include exploring in detail with them what particular arrangements and facilities they might need to help them in their new role.

Our member development programme includes an annual invitation for each councillor to complete a questionnaire that is used to develop with them a Personal Development

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Plan (“PDP”). The questionnaire will ask whether a councillor considers themselves to be disabled. This will allow support for disabled councillors to be included in the PDP, even if the councillor did not have the disability when first elected.

Actions to address the needs of disabled councillors

To assist councillors who have a hearing impairment, we will hold council and committee meetings in premises where an induction loop is available.

To assist councillors with mobility issues, we will hold council and committee meetings in premises that are wheelchair accessible.

We will plan the ongoing refurbishment of the Town Hall to fully comply with our legal obligations under the Equality Act and to be as accessible as possible to all councillors.

We will produce committee papers in pdf format so that they can be “read aloud” by Windows and Mac operating systems.

Should it be necessary, we will produce committee papers in braille or large print.

As well as these commitments, we will work with councillors with disabilities to seek to meet their specific needs as identified by our engagement with them set out above.

Revisiting this policy

We will aim to review this policy in the twelve months before each ordinary election to the council, and make any revisions to it that help us to better address the requirements of disabled councillors.

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