



Title:	Working with Councillors with Disabilities and Councillor Welfare
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 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.

1.2 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.

1.3 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.

1.4 A disability is defined under the Equality Act 2010 *“if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities”*, although the Council aims to provide support for those with short term needs also. Reference throughout this document to ‘disability’ aims to reflect the definition.

1.5 Whether or not they have disability, the role of a councillor can be physically and emotionally draining. Members are not exempt from and can suffer from worry and stress.

1.6 The Member Development Strategy details the arrangements that have been put in place to help all councillors to carry out their responsibilities. This policy sets out the arrangements that are in place to assist with the particular needs of councillors who have a disability and to help all councillors manage welfare issues.

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2.0 The Law

2.1 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.

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

2.3 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.

2.4 Councils are not under any legal obligation to provide welfare support for councillors except where associated with disabilities. However, the Council recognises and is mindful of its public sector equality duty in helping councillors to be the best councilor that they can be which can include helping individual members to deal with the pressures of their role.

2.5 As a council, we will look to:

- Remove or minimise any disadvantages members may have because of their disability.
- Take steps to meet the needs of people with disabilities that are different to needs of people who don't.
- Take steps to encourage people with disabilities to get involved in public life or any activity in which their participation is disproportionately low.

3.0 Our Aims

3.1 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 We also aim to assist members to cope with the stresses and pressures caused by being a councillor, and will put in place services and facilities for those purposes.

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

4.1 We will offer anyone who has disabilities, of whatever nature, 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.

4.2 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.

5.0 Actions to help us understand the individual needs of disabled councillors

5.1 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.

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

5.3 Our Member Development Programme includes an invitation for each councillor to complete a questionnaire that is used to develop with them a Personal Development 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.

6.0 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.

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7.0 Actions to help members with general welfare issues

- We have given the Member Development Steering Group a wider remit to encompass general member welfare issues, as well as development and training.
- We have given members' access to the Employees' Assistance Programme. This will provide assistance for members and their families who are going through personal difficulties or difficulties related to their council role.
- We will regularly review the whether our arrangements for member welfare are appropriate and effective.

8.0 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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