

A DisABILITY Policy for Exeter Diocese: Church is for everyone

This policy reflects our concern for the communities in which we serve and how we wish to consider their needs as part of our mission. We recognise that many parishes already respond to the needs of local people and that there is much good practice from which we can learn.

So this policy and guidance draws on current good practice and aims to help us all become more effective in serving our communities with joy. Many have found that when we positively embrace changes on behalf of others, we improve things for everyone, not just people with disabilities. It also meets the legal requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

We benefit from the experience and skills of Devon's growing and ageing population. The increasing proportion of older people brings us both the advantages of experience but also the responsibility of acknowledging their needs. Adjustments will be needed to both help people continue to make a contribution to Church life and to reach out to others with similar needs with the love of Christ.

We also recognise the needs of the 84,000 (eighty-four thousand) people in Devon who are currently providing care for their loved ones. They need a Church community around them that understands, supports and continues to include them despite their challenges.

And we remember that disability also affects younger people. There are Devon families with children with additional needs who struggle to participate with us at church activities, not just because of difficulties in our buildings but because we are unaware of their needs. A shocking 90 per cent of families with children that have additional needs are unchurched.

However, we rejoice in the many people living with disabilities, and Deaf people, who serve as clergy, Readers, churchwardens, PCC secretaries, treasurers, Diocesan Synod members, office holders and volunteers among us. We appreciate their contributions and experience, without which we are diminished, and we are grateful for the advice and lead they can give us in improving our welcome to others.

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.” (Romans 12:3-8.)

1. Introduction

1.2 The purpose of this policy

- To acknowledge that the Gospel inspires us to include all people with disabilities, their carers, and their ministry, at every level in the Diocese and in our parishes.
- To show how the Diocese complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, its obligations to its employees and as a service-provider.
- To inform and support the Church at all levels in the Diocese, in good practice in all areas of organisation, life, work and strategy.
- To provide a framework for parishes, benefices and Mission Communities to consider preparing their own policy or statement.

1.2 Definition of disability

The Equality Act 2010 says a disability is a “physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

1.3 How the Equality Act 2010 relates to Exeter Diocese, parishes and Mission Communities as service providers and employers.

The Equality Act 2010 says service providers and employers must take reasonable steps to ensure that their policies, practices and procedures enable people with all kinds of disability to make full use of anything we offer to the public, or to work comfortably within the environment.

1.4 In terms of the Equality Act 2010, voluntary work attracts the same rights as others in a paid capacity. Our legal obligations therefore apply to everyone, paid or voluntary. If our practice makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to work, or to use our services, we are in breach of the Act unless we take steps to change. These are known as ‘reasonable adjustments’. For example, if our premises have physical features, including acoustics or lighting, that make a significant impact on how a person can perform work, or to use our services, we should take steps to remove or alter those features, wherever practical. This also applies to work practices.

1.5 If an auxiliary aid or service would enable a person with disabilities to use our services then we should take reasonable steps to provide it.

1.6 These are not voluntary concessions to people with disabilities; they are legal obligations but they are more than that, in the Church they are expressions of God’s love.

1.7 Strategy

This policy is supported by more detailed strategy, local case studies providing samples of good practice from parishes, and resources for training and guidance. These will be

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published and made available to all PCCs, parishes and Mission Communities, and will be included on the website.

1.8 Monitor and review

The implementation of this policy will be evaluated by a five year audit process through the Diocesan Disability Steering Group.

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2.1 We will encourage a culture of listening and consultation so that we can learn from people with disabilities, recognising that all disabilities are different. Our commitment is to provide opportunities for full participation wherever possible. We will find ways to listen to their experiences, value their contributions and provide a culture that encourages disclosure of needs, so that we can benefit from a richer, more creative and more productive culture.

2.2 Disabilities include sensory impairment, mobility difficulties, mental health issues, learning disabilities and dementia, among many other disabilities both hidden and apparent which affect daily activities.

3. Our responsibilities as Service Providers

3.1 Exeter Diocese will support parishes and Mission Communities in their mission to include people with disabilities through the provision of training, information and resources. This will include disability awareness training for diocesan staff, clergy and Readers.

3.2 The Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) will find ways to ensure that all applications take into account the needs of disabled people and a consultant Disability Adviser to the DAC will be appointed.

3.3 Exeter Diocese will do a regular access audit of all Diocesan Offices and will implement findings as soon as possible. As an example of good practice, people with disabilities will be given an opportunity to review the buildings and make additional suggestions.

3.4 We recognise that those with a disability may be more vulnerable to abuse and will refer to our safeguarding policy and guidance when necessary.

3. Whenever possible, repairs to existing vicarages will take into account accessibility, and if new vicarages are chosen or built, then accessibility will be part of the criteria.

4. Our Responsibilities as Employers

4.1 We recognise that Exeter Diocese benefits from the experience and skills of people with disabilities and so we will make 'reasonable adjustments' to help both staff and volunteers, ordained and lay, make their contribution. For example, this may include adjusting working hours and practices or providing special equipment to help someone perform their role to the best of their potential.

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4.2 Assistance dogs will be permitted for interviews, management and training sessions.

4.3 Management processes such as interviews, reviews will be held in accessible locations whenever required.

5. Our responsibilities as trainers and organisers of meetings and conferences

5.1 Exeter Diocese will routinely select venues for all meetings, events and training, which are accessible to people with disabilities, including accessible toilet facilities and a loop system. It can be more costly to change a venue because of someone's need rather than book an accessible venue from the start and choosing a venue which is not accessible can send out the wrong message. Things to consider are car parking facilities; steps; toilets; corridors; seating arrangements; loop systems; the position of screens; evacuation procedures for people in wheelchairs and those with sensory impairments.

5.2 These principles apply to training events, Diocesan Synod, Bishop's Diocesan Council meetings (BDC), Deanery Meetings, Chapter Meetings and committee meetings. We will be sensitive to the needs of members and will choose accessible locations and provide appropriate resources when necessary so that all can attend and participate. An assessment for special requirements will be included in all booking forms for training events, Continuing Ministerial Development, notification of meetings, diocesan committees, invitations etc, so that the appropriate provision can be made for all people with disability needs. We want people to be confident in our commitment to full participation.

5.3 Assistance dogs will be permitted to all activities when requested.

5.4 Exeter Diocese will raise awareness of 'Clear and Large Print Guidance' to help staff prepare training materials, presentations, papers, minutes and communications that are readable for all. We recommend the guidelines from the UK Association for Accessible Formats.

5.5 On request Exeter Diocese will provide presentations and material including supplementary material in advance and in alternative formats, such as large print, Braille, audio tape or computer disc.

5.6 Provision for a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter at events and training will be made available on request. When using BSL/English Interpreters, written material will be provided in advance. For periods longer than one hour, two interpreters are normally booked.

10. Implementation

A more detailed strategy to support this policy, a recommended policy for parishes, local case studies providing samples of good practice from parishes will be published and made available to all PCCs, parishes and Mission Communities. Further resources for training and guidance will be included on the website.

Policy agreed at Exeter Diocesan Synod

Date:

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To be reviewed:

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