# **A blue and green logo Description automatically generatedLocal Election Manifesto 2024**

# **Working Towards Disability Equality**

# **“Me Today is You Tomorrow”**

# **Background**

The 2022 census shows that the number of people living with a disabling condition is currently 1,109,557 people: representing 22% of the population[[1]](#footnote-2). This is a sizeable electoral demographic, approximately **one in five people** in each community. Also, consider people’s wider circle, of family and friends who also want to see positive change for disabled people. Anyone can acquire a disability at any point in life, or as we age - **‘Me Today, is You Tomorrow’** - it is therefore everyone’s business.

Local councillors **have a responsibility** to ensure the inclusion of disabled people in their communities and that the work of local government does not further marginalise or exclude them. A community that is accessible for disabled people is accessible to all.

**Make a Difference as an Elected Local Representative**

The Local Elections are an opportunity for positive change and DFI is calling on all local election candidates to prioritise disability and, if elected, to actively introduce and support measures that enable the inclusion of disabled people in all aspects of community life.

This can centre around five broad themes:

1. A central role within Local Authorities, which is properly resourced with responsibility around disability inclusion e.g. full-time Disability Access Officer for each Local Authority.
2. Housing for all.
3. Participation of disabled people in public and political life.
4. Accessibility of the built environment and local amenities.
5. Access to information in preferred and accessible formats.

There is a danger that we are moving away from independent living as an achievable reality for many disabled people. Disabled people are telling us of increased levels of exclusion from community life.

For instance:

* Inaccessible walkways, such as roadworks being undertaken with no consideration for wheelchair users or those with sensory impairment.
* Prioritisation of cyclists over pedestrians and unsafe junctions between bus-stops and cycle lanes for those with a mobility or sensory impairment, make people feel unsure about getting out and about.
* Information provided by public services that is not in accessible formats.
* Inaccessible, or low levels of accessible public transport.
* Long social housing waiting lists, or housing offered to disabled people that is not accessible or wheelchair liveable.
* Policies and programmes that do not consider their impact on disabled people (e.g. the recent Re-Turn scheme).
* Lack of integration between Local Authorities and HSE services which creates a dependence on family caregiving, including a reliance on ageing parents to provide care.

These are only a handful of the issues we hear regularly.

We know the role of the **Access Officer** within the Local Authority is particularly important to drive inclusion at a local level. However, many Local Authorities do not have this as a full-time position. The role of the Access Officer is also not standardised across the country. This must be addressed as a priority.

The remainder of this document outlines a series of other actions that elected representatives to local government can undertake to ensure inclusive and equal communities for everyone. These are presented under the headings of accessibility; supporting independent living; communication and information; standards of living; transport; participation in political and public life and participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport.

## **Accessibility**[[2]](#footnote-3)

Accessibility means disabled people have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment both in urban and in rural areas. There are several ways Local Elected representatives can champion and achieve this:

* Priority given to creating accessible local building, paths, and walkways, as well as ensuring accessibility is included in restoration, and refurbishment projects.
* Consult disabled people at planning stages and throughout the completion of building works.
* Make local tourist attractions and recreation sites accessible with paths, roads, public transport, and local infrastructure enabling accessibility for all.
* Check that the district engineers are trained in universal design[[3]](#footnote-4).

## **Living Independently and being Included in the Community[[4]](#footnote-5)**

Disabled people should have an equal right to live in the community, where they can fully enjoy, be included, and participate,

Local Elected representatives can achieve this:

* When the Council’s Housing and Disability Steering Group achieves its aims and works effectively with the Housing Strategic Policy Committee.
* Through the realisation of the role of the Disability Friendly Housing Technical Adviser.
* By increasing the number of wheelchair liveable homes and universally designed homes in their area.
* With better information. For example, does the local authority have adequate data on the housing needs of people with disabilities living in the community, as well as information on those moving out of institutions of all kinds, so that their needs can be matched with appropriate housing.
* Consider how and if the housing adaptation grant is effectively meeting the needs of local people in the community.
* With integrated working with the HSE, community groups and other statutory bodies, so people have a seamless experience of services at a local level. For instance, independent living can be achieved through integrated housing supports/adaptations under the remit of local authorities and with appropriate home supports and personal assistance under the remit of the HSE.

## **Communication and Information[[5]](#footnote-6)**

For people to ask for, receive and understand information, there needs to be options in relation to communication formats. This could be easy to read versions for example.

Local Elected representatives can drive this by promoting and demanding:

* All council documents, such as local economic community plans are available in different formats, including easy toread versions.
* Sign-language information videos about local services are available on the council website.
* The council’s website meets EU web accessibility standards and people can access information and navigate the site easily.
* Customer services and other staff are trained in disability awareness and use of plain English.
* Internal policies which explain how to order information in different formats, or book sign language interpreters if required.

## **An Adequate Standard of Living[[6]](#footnote-7)**

Disabled people have a right to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families. This includes adequate food, clothing, and access to public housing programmes, support with the extra costs involved in having a disability, AND to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

Disabled people are one of the groups most at risk of poverty in the country. Local social inclusion programmes, for example Social Inclusion Community Activation Programmes, monitored by the Local Community Development Committee, support disabled people against social exclusion.

The experience of poverty is also about more than income - it is also a result of discrimination, lack of accessibility and access to services.

Local Elected representatives can:

* Make people aware of the [Community Welfare Service of Department of Social Protection](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/12110-how-to-access-community-welfare-services/?referrer=https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/cb07d7-supplementary-welfare-allowance-swa-list-of-offices-administering-swa/).
* Understand the poverty rates in your area and the needs of disabled people, including support with the extra disability-related costs.
* Support the collaborative development and implementation of poverty reduction strategies at local authority level.[[7]](#footnote-8)

# **Transport[[8]](#footnote-9)**

Transport is a critical enabler in the delivery of disability rights, supporting people’s mobility, their independent living, participation in community life and access to education and employment. Accessible urban and rural public transport is a very practical means to open up all the opportunities of community to people with limited mobility.

The existing Disabled Parking Scheme is under review and any new Disabled Parking Scheme must ensure that it supports and protects the rights of people with disabilities and meets the responsibility of all public bodies to consider this[[9]](#footnote-10). Specifically:

* Increasing the number of disability parking bays to meet need; with Local Authorities applying a ratio for disabled parking bays in all public car parks; rather than limit the number of badges available due to limitation of parking spaces.

In addition, Local elected representatives can champion:

* For increased availability of more frequent accessible public transport in both urban and rural areas,
* Increased numbers of accessible taxis
* Connectivity across all modes of public transport in our local communities.

# **Participation in Political and Public Life[[10]](#footnote-11)**

The representation and participation of disabled people in political and public life is low. This can mean they are not heard in political decision- making. There are actions that can increase participation and improve representation.

Local Elected representatives can achieve this:

* If disabled people can participate in decision-making in the Council through a local access or representative group.
* Through the enhancement of the role of the Access Officer (as stated above).
* If all public consultations are accessible, with several ways in which people can contribute, in a format that suits them.
* If polling stations and meeting spaces for public consultations are accessible for everyone. Are they also reachable by public transport with ease of access to public facilities?
* When people have access to assistive technology/devices that enable their participation and to also explore and deliver options for meetings that enable participation e.g. hybrid meetings, online and in person options.
* All local government planning, actions and evaluation must go through disability proofing, to ensure disability is considered in mainstream decision-making and planning processes.

## **Participating in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure and Sport**[[11]](#footnote-12)

Cultural life and sports are important aspects of local communities; to support people's wellbeing and sense of belonging. Disabled people do not want to be excluded from this aspect of community life. For example, children with disabilities should have equal access with other children to participation in play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities.

Local Elected representatives must take the opportunity in local government to:

* Ensure that all local sporting facilities, libraries, museums, theatres, festival venues and community spaces are accessible where disabled people can participate and enjoy these local amenities.
* Ensure that local sports partnership has a Sports Inclusion Disability Officer, and this role is adequately resourced to support high levels of disabled persons’ participation.
* Make public playgrounds and amenities accessible to all to promote inclusive play, ensuring children with disabilities can participate and are not segregated from their peers.
* Ensure there is a beach mobility wheelchair for local beaches.
* Changing Places toilet facilities are developed to make local amenities accessible for everyone.
* Undertake disability audits in the local area and direct funding to implement subsequent audit recommendations.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The Local Elections are an opportunity to build fairer, inclusive, and equal communities – that can be accessed and enjoyed by all. Inaccessible buildings, walkways, playgrounds, and community facilities send a message to disabled people that they are not welcome, and they are not worth investing in.

The actions above are not a comprehensive list of all that can be done to improve inclusion and equality for disabled people at a local level. They are some practical ways that each elected local representative can apply to make real, impactful change during their time in Local Government, championing the rights of disabled people within the council. That decisions are made with disabled people, and measures are actively taken to include and involve people in decision-making.

|  |
| --- |
| **A note on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN CRPD**    The actions outlined in DFI’s Local Election Manifesto support Ireland’s implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN CRPD.  The UN CRPD is a human rights treaty developed by the United Nations and outlines the rights of people with disabilities.  The treaty was ratified by Ireland in 2018. It does not create any new rights. Instead, it sets out what countries must do to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights as everybody else. This includes acknowledgement that people with disabilities may need support to fully exercise their rights.  The UN CRPD is a powerful tool to make positive change in people’s lives and can be utilised at a local government level. |

Icon

Description automatically generated**DFI’s vision**

An Ireland where people with disabilities are participating fully in all aspects of society.

Icon

Description automatically generated**DFI’s mission**

DFI is a federation of member organisations working with people with disabilities to implement UN CRPD and ensure equal participation.

Icon

Description automatically generated**Four-year goal**

Member organisations are actively involved in DFI, working to implement the UN CRPD and to achieve the equal participation of people with disabilities in society.

DFI, Fumbally Court, Fumbally Lane, Dublin 8

Tel: 01-4547978

Email: info@disability-federation.ie

Web: www.disability-federation.ie

Registered Charity Number: 6177 Company Number: 140048

Charities Regulator Number: 20010584



 

@DisabilityFed         @disabilityfederationire @DFIIreland



1. https://www.disability-federation.ie/news/latest/2023/06/15/census-2022-shows-a-growing-population-with-disabi/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. This mirrors Article 9 of the UN CRPD which focuses on Accessibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The UN CRPD outlines universal design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. This reflects Article 19 of the UN CRPD which focuses on independent living and being included in the community. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. This reflects Article 21 of the UN CRPD which focuses on **Freedom of Expression and Opinion, and Access to Information:** [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Relates to Article 28 of UN CRPD on **Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection** [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. See, for example, ‘There are no services, they just put you on tablets’: Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare, https://clareppn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Clare\_Anti\_Poverty\_Report\_Sept2022\_web.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. This supports implementation of Articles 119 (living independent), Article 20 (personal mobility), Article 27 (employment) and Article 30 (participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport) within the UN CRPD. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Relates to Human Rights and Public Sector Duty [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Relates to Article 29 of the UN CRPD on Participation in Political and Public Life. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. This reflects Article 30 of the UN CRPD on Participating in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure, and Sport [↑](#footnote-ref-12)