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ILMI AND SOUTH DUBLIN COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

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MAKING INCLUSION
A REALITY

Contents

CLICK ON TITLE TO GO DIRECT TO SECTION

Making Inclusion a Reality Introduction

We as disabled people continue to experience significant inequalities in Ireland. Despite many advances in equality issues, we are continually denied the same choices that many non-disabled people take for granted. We are rarely directly consulted on what we want to shape and control our lives. Too often discussions about disability inclusion exclude us and rely on consultations with service providers instead.

Central to the effective implementation of the UNCRPD in Ireland will be the full and effective participation of disabled people in the design, delivering and monitoring of policy at a local, regional, national and even international level. For too long we have been excluded from these spaces but now we are witnessing the creation and growth of organic grassroots Disabled Persons Organisations (DPO) which give an authentic collective representative voice to influence the implementation of the UNCRPD.

For decades, we have been saying "Nothing about us without us". Our project in partnership with South Dublin County Council puts that voiced philosophy into practice – it makes inclusion a reality. It shows that there needs to be an investment in creating spaces for disabled people to work collectively together: spaces in which to analyse the issues that we face and strategise on how we want to address these. It establishes a clear process that needs investment in order for disabled people to support their representatives at the table and make informed recommendations and/or decisions.

Second, it establishes that the active participation of disabled people in Housing Disability Steering Groups (HDSGs) also requires change in how these forums work to build inclusion through a values-based, participative approach. It recognises that for real and meaningful participation, it is not only about having authentic voices representing the collective views of disabled people but that non-disabled people representatives need resources and supports to develop best practice on creating truly inclusive spaces.

As we begin the development of a new housing strategy for Disabled People, ILMI hopes that the pathways established in "Making Inclusion A Reality" will inform how HDSGs are supported. For the new strategy to be successful, disabled people need to be invested in to ensure we can bring our collective voice to HDSGs. There also needs to be a consistent approach to a values-based approach through training and supports to develop priorities and processes for all HDSGs.

With that appropriate investment, the new Housing Strategy for Disabled People can meet our needs as disabled people and establish and embed participatory practices as per Articles 4.3 and Article 29 of the UNCRPD.

Des Kenny, ILMI Chairperson

Foreword from South Dublin County Council

As part of the Making Inclusion a Reality Project, the Housing Disability Steering Group of South Dublin County Council had the opportunity to collaborate with the Independent Living Movement Ireland (IMLI) and the South Dublin Disability Platform (SDDP) to develop a model of best practice for the participation of disabled persons on the Housing Disability Steering Group.

The Council is committed to working with the SDDP to ensure that disabled persons have the platform to engage with Housing decision-makers and have the opportunity to implement change in Housing provision.

The Housing and Disability Steering Group will communicate its results to the wider local population of disabled people on an annual basis, through various channels, and will continuously reassess the operational model of the group to ensure knowledge and information is shared and to ensure all members are active participants in the decision making of the group.

Neil Hanly, Senior Executive Officer, Housing, SDCC

The Council is committed to working with the SDDP to ensure that disabled persons have the platform to engage with Housing decision-makers and have the opportunity to implement change in Housing provision."

1. Introduction

'Making Inclusion a Reality' was a joint initiative of Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) and South Dublin County Council. The project was funded by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and facilitated by Values Lab.

The aim of the initiative was to develop a model of best practice for the participation of disabled people on a local authority housing and disability steering group. This model was to encompass the establishment of a platform of disabled people, to enable this participation, and to include a model for the implementation of the public sector equality and human rights duty.

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2. Background

2.1 Element one: formation and capacity-building of the platform

A briefing event on the initiative was a starting point in establishing a platform of disabled people in the South Dublin area.

This event was organised by ILMI. As a result of the event, it was possible to convene an opening meeting for those interested in establishing what became known as the South Dublin Disability Platform (the Platform).

A participative process was facilitated with members of the Platform to: explore their ambitions for the platform and how the platform might operate; and to build participants capacity in areas including: network building, values-led approaches, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, and housing policy.

Over a series of meetings, the platform members developed the South Dublin Disability Platform Guidance Document (see Section 4).

During this period South Dublin County Council (SDCC) was preparing its Strategic Plan for Housing People with a Disability 2021-2026. The Platform conducted an assessment of the equality and human rights issues relevant to this function of the local authority and made this available to the South Dublin County Council (SDCC) Housing and Disability Steering Group. It later reviewed a draft of the Strategic Plan, made available by SDCC, as a check on the extent to which the equality and human rights issues had been adequately and appropriately addressed. A report of this meeting was made available to SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group.

2.2 Element two: building the model of participation with the South Dublin County Council Housing and Disability Steering Group

Three online workshops were facilitated with the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group with the participation of members of the Platform. The workshops focused on: undertaking a values-led approach to the functioning of the Steering Group; implementing the public sector equality and human rights duty; and models for participation by disabled people on the steering group. The conclusions from these workshops were developed for agreement by the Steering Group as on Operational Protocol (see Section 3).

[1]Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 requires public bodies to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and protect human rights of staff, those to whom they provides services, across all of their functions.

3. Model of Participation: Operational Protocol of the South Dublin County Council Housing and Disability Steering Group

3.1 Introduction

This protocol sets out three frames developed by the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group with the South Dublin Disability Platform to shape and set standards for a model of participation for disabled people on the steering group.

The three frames are:

01	02	03
A values-led approach to the priorities and processes of the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group;	An assessment of equality and human rights issues relevant to the functions of the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group to shape SDCC's implementation of the public sector equality and human rights duty; and	Achieving and enabling an effective participation by disabled people on the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group

3.2 A Values-Led Approach to the Priorities and Processes of the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group

Dignity is about respect and a holistic acknowledgement of each person's equal human worth. It involves valuing the shared culture and experience of particular groups of people and being open.

Statement of Priority

The Housing and Disability Steering Group strives to ensure disabled people are enabled and supported to: know their rights; understand how to access these rights; and secure the appropriate response to their needs.

Statement of Process

The Housing and Disability Steering Group works in a manner that is honest, open and accepting, enabling participants to share ideas and perspectives, with the contribution of each being respected and valued.

Empowerment is about having a strong voice. It involves meaningful engagement with decision-makers at all levels, and having influence to effect change.

Statement of Priority

The Housing and Disability Steering Group strives to ensure disabled people are valued partners in the process of housing development and provision.

Statement of Process

The Housing and Disability Steering Group works in a manner that values the lived experience and voice of disabled people and ensures all voices are heard, with people being supported to participate effectively as needed.

Inclusion is about accessibility and participation in society, on the basis of recognising our diversity. It involves valuing difference as part of the beauty of the mix that is involved in being human.

Statement of Priority

The Housing and Disability Steering Group strives to ensure that: the supports are in place for disabled people to live independently; the diversity of disabled people is understood and catered for; and disabled people can live in an environment that enables participation in the community and society.

Statement of Process

The Housing and Disability Steering Group works in a manner that makes reasonable accommodations for participants needs, in ensuring they can contribute and have their say.

Choice is about having appropriate and meaningful options and living independently. It involves self-determination for disabled people to determine their own lives on an equal basis with all members of society and to pursue their choices without fear of negative consequences.

Statement of Priority

The Housing and Disability Steering Group strives to ensure that: a broad range of housing options are available to disabled people; disabled people are enabled to live lives of their choosing; and options are opened up to address the changing needs of a disabled person over time.

Statement of Process

The Housing and Disability Steering Group works in a manner to ensure knowledge and information is shared and available to all members to enable real choices in the decisions being made.

3.3 Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty: Assessment of Equality and Human Rights Issues[2]

The SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group implements the public sector equality and human rights duty (the Duty) to ensure a planned and systematic approach to equality and human rights in its work.

The Duty is a statutory requirement on public bodies to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and protect human rights for their service users, policy beneficiaries, and staff, across all of their function areas.

There are three key steps required of public bodies, under the Duty, to:

Undertake an assessment of the equality and human rights issues, relevant to their functions, for the identified groups for the Duty (which include disabled people);

Identify actions in train or proposed, to address the issues identified in the assessment, when preparing and reviewing plans and policies; and

Report annually on progress made in addressing these equality and human rights issues.

[2]Section 42, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014.

Assessment of Equality and Human Rights Issues

Dignity is about empathy, respect, and a holistic acknowledgement of each person's equal human worth. It involves valuing the shared culture and experience of particular groups of people and being open and non-judgemental.

Priority equality and human rights issues:

Discrimination: disabled people are three times more likely to report discrimination when trying to access housing, than non-disabled people.

Lack of awareness of disability issues and perspectives based on a medical model of disability, among service providers.

Inaccessible services in terms of physical spaces, communication media, and service design.

Segregated approaches to addressing the needs of disabled people, which limit their access to the full range of mainstream housing and homeless services, not precluding the need for positive action.

Empowerment is about having a strong voice. It involves meaningful engagement with decision-makers at all levels, and having influence to effect change.

Priority equality and human rights issues:

Making decisions about housing for disabled people without their input.

Lack of support for, and engagement with Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs).

Lack of voice and agency for disabled people transitioning from institutional settings.

Disabled people being infantilised and disempowered on the basis of the medical model of disability

Inclusion is about accessibility and participation in society on the basis of recognising our diversity. It involves valuing difference as part of the beauty of the mix that is involved in being human.

Priority equality and human rights issues:

Lack of universal design in housing and public spaces and buildings.

Lack of a tailored approach for each disabled person and failure to appreciate that one size does not fit all.

Failure by policy-makers and service providers to understand and take account of the full diversity of disabled people.

Invisibility of disabled people.

Choice Choice is about having appropriate and meaningful options and living independently. It involves self-determination for disabled people to determine their own lives on an equal basis with all members of society and to pursue their choices without fear of negative consequences.

Priority equality and human rights issues:

Lack of joined-up thinking and provision from the different services required to enable independent living for disabled people.

Lack of affordable housing for disabled people.

Failure by service providers to respond adequately to individual preferences of disabled people.

Lack of appropriate and adequate supports for disabled people to transition from institutional settings.

Isolation in relation to housing location and lack of access to transport.

Homelessness: disabled people are overrepresented among the homeless population (more than 1 in 4 homeless people in Ireland).

Poverty: disabled people are more likely to live in/be at risk of poverty than non-disabled people, resulting in such as over-crowded accommodation, and housing and environmental deprivation.

Institutionalisation of disabled people and barriers to life in the community.

Lack of integrated wraparound services and lack of Personal Assistance Services and lack of provision that enables such supports.

Lack of knowledge and information about housing processes, service requirements, and rights.

Lack of information about, and transparency in relation to, the situation of a disabled person within the housing system.

3.4 Achieving and enabling an effective participation of disabled people on the Housing and Disability Steering Group

3.4.1 Forms and Processes for Participation of Disabled People

Three disabled people from the South Dublin Disability Platform will participate on the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group.

Two members of the Platform will participate on an ongoing basis, to allow for mutual support, with the third place operating as a rotating position from the Platform membership, to build expertise across the Platform.

The South Dublin Disability Platform will serve as a space to enable and bring forward representation of local disabled people onto the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group. It will act as a partner in guiding and implementing the model of participation in this protocol.

The SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group will communicate its work, and related outcomes, to the wider local population of disabled people (housing applicants and tenants) through:

Effective and accessible briefing events and initiatives for disabled tenants and housing applicants on the work of the steering group,

An accessible housing portal on the SDCC website that includes a focus on housing for disabled people, including:

  o practical information to support and empower disabled tenants and housing applicants,

  o stories of lived experience of disabled tenants and housing applicants, and

  o minutes of the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group meetings and other relevant information on the work of the Steering Group, and

Open consultations with disabled people at key moments in the housing and disability strategy – review and planning.

3.4.2 Valuing and Supporting Participation of Disabled People

Timely provision of information in relation to meetings that is:

accessible and clear;

provided in electronic format; and

includes presentations, with voiceover available, in advance of meetings.

A SDCC contact person will be identified and available to members to support an understanding of briefing material provided in relation to meetings.

Background information will be made available to members to enable informed participation on the Steering Group, including:

A briefing meeting for the South Dublin Disability Platform prior to its first involvement on the Steering Group,

Agenda items that include for presentations by members on their perspectives and issues, and

An SDCC contact person identified and available to members for this purpose.

Reasonable accommodation provisions will be made for disabled members, with provision made to enable participation of individual members. Online meetings have been found to be productive, and where face-to-face meeting are deemed necessary and appropriate, hybrid approaches will be pursued to enable participation as required.

The Chairperson, in the course of Steering Group meetings, will check that members have felt enabled to make their contributions, and, if required, identify and address any barriers emerging.

SDCC will be supportive of the South Dublin Disability Platform and its operations, as a platform for enabling participation of disabled people on the Housing and Disability Steering Group, and in securing the model of participation set out in this protocol.

3.4.3 Additional Focus Points and Themes for the Steering Group Agenda

The core agenda of the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group is concerned with the development, implementation and monitoring of the SDCC Housing and Disability Strategy.

Alongside this core agenda, additional agenda items will be included to enable a focus on:

Capacity building:

To enable informed participation and to support shared understanding of relevant equality and human rights issues for disabled people;

Equality and human rights:

To progress implementation of the public sector equality and human rights duty on an ongoing basis at key points in the reporting on, review of, and any further development of the Housing and Disability Strategy; and

Review:

To review implementation of this model of participation within the Steering Group; and to assess the alignment of its work with the values statement.

4. Organising for Participation: South Dublin Disability Platform Guidance Document

4.1 Introduction

The South Dublin Disability Platform seeks to create a strong network of disabled people that pursues common goals, brings forward a unified voice, and achieves traction and synergy from working together and to establish a platform to enable and bring forward representation of disabled people on relevant bodies.

This document has been developed as a foundation stone for the Platform. It is a living document which will be further developed by the Platform as it grows and expands its ambition.

4.2 The Frame for our Work

Our work is framed and informed by commitment to the provisions and implementation of:

UN CRPD

Public sector equality and human right duty;

The Equal Status Acts; and

Universal design.

4.3 Our Core Values

What we seek to achieve as a platform and how we go about our work as a platform, is motivated by values of:

Dignity

Empowerment

Choice

Inclusion

These values act as a compass: to guide our work; to remind us of our collective common goal; and to direct our energies.

Dignity is about empathy, respect, and a holistic acknowledgement of each person's equal human worth. It involves valuing the shared culture and experience of particular groups of people and being open and non-judgemental.

Our Priority:

We work to change attitudes and inform assumptions, where necessary, and to strengthen understanding, in particular within relevant institutions.

How we work:

We work in a manner that is committed and collective, and that involves debating out issues, engaging in active listening and an openness to supporting different perspectives, and respecting confidentiality within the group.

Empowerment is about having a strong voice. It involves meaningful engagement with decision-makers at all levels, and having influence to effect change.

Our Priority:

We work to ensure the participation of disabled people is formalised and recognised within the relevant institutions, and to mobilise a collective voice for rights and break down barriers of isolation that disempower disabled people.

How we work:

We work in a manner that enhances a sense of positive identity and entitlement for each member as part of the platform, and that enable us to find agreement and stay on the same page in pursuing our goals.

Inclusion is about accessibility and participation in society, on the basis of recognising our diversity. It involves valuing difference as part of the beauty of the mix that is involved in being human.

Our Priority:

We work for systemic change to ensure that housing developments are accessible and inclusive in integrating disabled people within communities and community life.

How we work:

We work in a manner that enables people to participate, taking account of their availability and needs, and finding solutions that work for everyone.

Choice Choice is about having appropriate and meaningful options and living independently. It involves self-determination for disabled people to determine their own lives on an equal basis with all members of society and to pursue their choices without fear of negative consequences.

Our Priority:

We work to challenge the housing disadvantage experienced by disabled people and to promote adequate options for disabled people to live independently and with autonomy in the community of their choice.

How we work:

We work in a manner that supports disabled people to have meaningful choices in being informed, having access to knowledge about their options, and being confident in pursing their preferences.

4.4 Aims and Objectives of the Platform

We aim to contribute to the goal of independent living for disabled people based on equality and human rights-based approaches, particularly in relation to housing policy, systems, and provision and related infrastructure at local authority level.

We seek to:

Promote

Promote initiatives that address the rights and particular needs of disabled people in mainstream housing policy, systems, and provision at local authority level, alongside positive action to address these particular needs and current disadvantage of disabled people in this area.

Ensure

Ensure that housing policy, systems and provision at local authority level are informed, from an early point, by disabled people, and accountable to disabled people, and that the participation of disabled people in this area is formalised and has influence through the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group.

Build

Build membership of and support for the platform, including making links with local allies, the wider disability movement and civil society organisations working on housing and equality issues.

4.5 Our Way of Working

4.5.1 Approach

We work in a manner that is:

Respectful

Respectful of each other, dealing with any clashes of needs or perspectives prior to making decisions

Collaborative

Collaborative, collective, and creating a community of support, acting as a unified voice and ensuring we are all behind the positions that are brought forward;

Valuing

Valuing and accommodating the diversity of the group, ensuring the group is equal within itself, empowering each other, and ensuring each voice is heard within the platform;

We work in a way that is evidence-based, effective and solutions focussed. We bring forward and seek action on key policy and research documents that are currently in place or that become available.

We are strategic in our approach in seeking allies that would support our proposals and identifying and making use of levers for change in national policy and legislation.

4.5.2 Representation and Accountability

The platform serves to enable and bring forward representation of local disabled people onto the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group.

The platform is to be represented by three members on the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group. Two members will participate on an ongoing basis for a period of two years, with the third place operating as a rotating position held for a six-month period by different members of the platform.

To enable an effective and accountable participation at the four meetings of the SDCC Housing Disability Steering Group we:

Meet prior to each meeting to agree our approach and strategy for each of these meetings; and

Meet after each steering group meeting to get feedback from representatives and to review progress made.

In deciding on the representatives for the two-year period, the platform seeks members who have the time to give to this task, are willing to participate in preparatory meetings, hold knowledge of the local area and/or housing issues for disabled people, and are willing to participate in feedback meetings. Members will be invited to put their names forward for this role and a decision made by consensus, with a vote taken where there is not consensus.

In deciding on the rotating representatives for the six-month period, the platform seeks members who have time to attend the preparatory and feedback meetings and the steering group meetings and who seek to strengthen their knowledge and skills in relation to addressing issues of housing and disability through engagement with policy makers.

The platform will act as a partner in guiding and implementing the operational protocol adopted by the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group and achieving the model of participation set out in this protocol. It will ensure agendas of the steering group reflect the equality and human rights issues it identifies, and that the steering group works in a manner that is aligned with the values statement in the protocol.

The platform seeks briefings as required from SDCC to enable its representation and engages in informal networking meetings with other organisations represented on the steering group.

4.5.3 Operations

The platform works to realistic goals with growing ambition over time. Goals are set each year for our work.

The platform operates with a rotating chairperson. Those who wish to chair the platform do so for a two meeting phase, chairing the preparation meeting prior to a Housing and Disability Steering Group meeting and the feedback meeting after each steering group meeting. Another member then takes over for the next two meeting phase.

The administrative support provided by ILMI involves convening platform meetings, facilitating the organisation of platform meetings, supporting the chairperson at meetings, and preparing and circulating a minute of the meetings.

Decision-making on the platform is by consensus. Where a decision is required and there is not consensus, a vote of those present is taken to make a decision.

Members of the platform remain in contact with each other between meetings by means of a 'WhatsApp' group. A terms-of-reference guides this WhatsApp group.

We review our work, the working relations between members, and the impact of our work on an annual basis to ensure it is making a difference and to establish what needs to change if this is not the case.

We seek to ensure that the participation in public fora of disabled people in providing advice and perspective is valued and not taken for granted or provided at a cost. One element of this recognition is through securing funding for the platform to enable payment of an attendance stipend for such representation.

4.6 Strengthening our Platform

The platform is made up of disabled people who share the platform's values, aims and objectives, and approach to seeking change. We welcome participation of disabled people, across impairment and in all their diverse identities.

We work in an ongoing manner to promote and communicate about the platform and its work in order to strengthen it by getting more people involved.

We will work with the support of ILMI, which support involves:

Administrative support to convene, facilitate, and record meetings.

Support in accessing funding and in the management of any funds received.

Access to policy briefings and to ILMI networking on housing issues.

Capacity building opportunities.

We will build support for the platform through engagement with:

The SDCC Disability Consultative Panel.

The National Disability Authority Centre for Excellence in Universal Design.

Civil society allies that we identify as having potential for pursuing issues collectively, for example: Disabled Women Ireland; Disabled People's Organisations that are organising representation on local authority Housing and Disability Steering Groups.
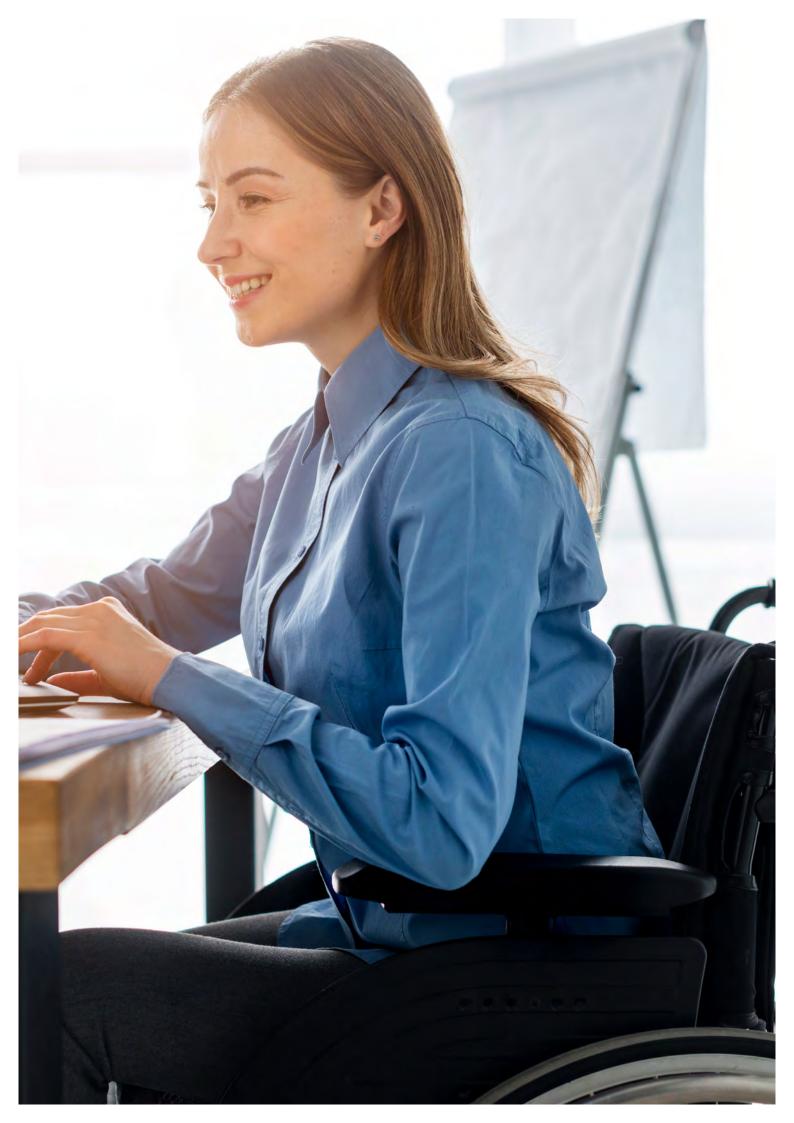
5. Key Learning

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Equality and human rights provide an important thread to inform all areas of the work and functioning of a local authority housing and disability steering group."

Participation of disabled people has been at the core of this initiative in its aspirations and implementation. Such participation on the participatory fora established by public bodies requires scale and a foundation. The scale involves numbers sufficient for disabled people to mutually support and to enable disabled people to gain experience and expertise in such fora. Three members, with one of these a rotating place, on the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group enabled such scale. Foundations for such participation involve a structure and operating procedure that enables: a broad participation of disabled people; agency in identifying representatives; a representative voice; and accountability. The Platform model allowed for such a foundation.

The members of the South Dublin Disability Platform gave time, thought and insight into the development of the Platform and in the creation of the operational protocol for the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group. There is an imperative for such participation on participatory fora established by public bodies to be recognised and valued. One element of this recognition is identified as being for the South Dublin Disability Platform to secure funding to enable payment of an attendance stipend for representation on such fora.

Equality and human rights provide an important thread to inform all areas of the work and functioning of a local authority housing and disability steering group. The full and effective implementation of the public sector equality and human rights duty offers an opportune approach to making such a thread integral to the work of a steering group. It is opportune in calling on a Duty that is a requirement across all functional areas of the local authority. It is effective in driving a planned and systematic approach to these issues in the work of the Steering Group.

Values provide an important driver and benchmark for the shared endeavour, mutual understanding, and effectiveness required in structures such as the South Dublin Disability Platform and the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group. It is of significance that both structures established the same core values: dignity, empowerment, choice, and inclusion. An ongoing engagement of these values in the work of the SDCC Housing and Disability Steering Group ensures a disability friendly space and promotes a disability equality focused endeavour.

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Nothing about us without us

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