

The Scottish Accessible Information Forum

**Barrier-Free Information**

How to Develop Your Local Accessible Information Strategy  
A Practical Guide for Local Authorities and Others

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If you want more information about this guide, or any other SAIF publications, contact:

**SAIF**

c/o Scottish Consumer Council

100 Queen Street

Glasgow G1 3DN

tel: 0141 226 5261

fax: 0141 221 0731

text: 0141 226 8459

email: [info@saifscotland.org.uk](mailto:info@saifscotland.org.uk)

website: [www.saifscotland.org.uk](http://www.saifscotland.org.uk)

## **Foreword**

*Information is not a luxury. It is an essential tool in all our lives and there should be no barriers preventing us from getting the information or advice we need. It is vital that information is accessible, relevant and accurate. This is no less true for disabled people and carers than it is for anyone else.*

With the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act and the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission, the legislative framework is beginning to encourage greater accessibility. Therefore, it is important that you develop a strategy for the provision of accessible, relevant and accurate user information.

The aim of this guide is to help local authorities and the agencies they work with improve the accessibility of the information and advice that is given to disabled people and their carers in their local area. It highlights what you can do to make a real difference to the quality of information and advice that local people get and it gives guidance on how to produce a local accessible information strategy.

Information also has a cost, both in staff time and money and needs to be managed like any other resource. Developing a local framework within which accessible information provision can be planned and developed will help ensure that the most effective use is made of limited resources.

I hope that this guide will help you build on the good practice that already exists in many areas and to continue to develop their information and advice provision in line with the needs of local people.

**Dorothy Granger**  
**Chair**  
**SAIF Local Strategies Working Group**

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## **Introduction**

This guide is designed to help you and the agencies you work with improve the delivery of information to disabled people.

It recommends a step-by-step process for you to follow so that information services in your area are co-ordinated, accessible and easy for members of the public to use. Everything in the guide has been checked by disabled people.

The guide explains why things need to change and offers straightforward ideas and suggestions to help you make the changes.

We know that disabled people face many difficulties getting information. We hope that this guide makes the process easier for all those involved, and opens up channels of communication to share information and good practice with other people from all over Scotland who are trying to achieve the same results.

## **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to the members of SAIF's Local Accessible Information Strategies Working Group:

Ben Forsyth

Dorothy Granger (Chair)

Margaret Hurcombe

Linda Kerr

Linda Miller

We are very grateful to all the people in local authorities and health boards who have responded to our enquiries with contact names, completed questionnaires and examples of good practice. We hope that this guide helps you promote the needs of disabled people locally and we look forward to continuing to work with you in the future.

## **What do Disabled People Need?**

Disabled people need access to accurate information that allows them to solve everyday problems. They may also need support to access that information, and advice on how to put it to good use.

They need the same kind of information as everyone else and, in addition, may also need information related to their impairment and the impact it has on their lives.

They need to be effectively included in the planning and provision of services. There is no substitute for the involvement of disabled people themselves.

A service that has substantial dialogue with its service users and an awareness of the needs of potential clients is likely to provide a better, more cost-effective service than one that has made assumptions about the needs of its client group.

As well as good information services of a high quality, disabled people also need a range of services that communicate effectively with each other and their (often similar) client groups. They want services that are knowledgeable about other sources of help and advice in the local area and that have effective signposting and referral procedures.

## What Is The Scottish Accessible Information Forum?

The Scottish Accessible Information Forum (SAIF) was set up as a result of the ***Enabling Information*** report (Scottish Office 1995), subsequently adopted by the Scottish Executive.

The project continues to be funded by the Scottish Executive, employs two part-time project workers with administrative support, and is based in the Scottish Consumer Council. The SAIF advisory body is made up of 21 people drawn from disability-led organisations and information providers.

SAIF supports the rights of disabled people and carers to have access to timely and accurate information to meet their needs.

The project aims to improve the provision of information to disabled people and carers and make information more accessible to everyone who needs it. Rather than being forced to rely on others, disabled people should receive information directly and in their preferred format.

SAIF has produced a range of free publications to support agencies that are addressing the issue of social inclusion and want to improve the service they offer to disabled people.

## What can local authorities do?

### Local authorities

- ◆ are the key agency for co-ordinating the efforts of service providers in the interests of meeting the information and advice needs of disabled people.
- ◆ have a statutory duty to provide information about council and other relevant services to disabled people.
- ◆ provide a lot of local information. They run their own information services and fund or work with all kinds of other services available to local people.
- ◆ can make a real difference to the quality of advice and information that disabled people get.

Disabled people use information and advice from a wide range of sources. This includes those that specialise in impairment issues, general information and advice agencies, and those where information or advice is only part of their work. Disabled people are very well equipped to help you produce a strategy to ensure that the provision of information and advice reflects their needs and aspirations.

It is desirable that agencies in both statutory and independent sectors participate as equal partners, and that disabled people are fully involved.

Your strategy should include:

### **1. Accessible information services**

Has a mapping exercise been carried out recently to find out what services are available locally and, crucially, how physically accessible they are? This means not only checking things like ramps and grab rails in toilets, but aids and adaptations like Braille signage, induction loop systems, textphones and web pages.

#### **Theory into Practice**

SAIF produce a guide called Making Websites Accessible that helps organisations provide the best possible service online.

→ **Get it from SAIF, contact details on Page 1**

The South Lanarkshire Disability Strategy Steering Group produce a Disability Checklist that gives a rough guide to identifying the barriers that may exist and ideas on how to tackle them.

→ **Get it from the Hamilton/East Kilbride Disability Forum on 01698 307733**

The Centre for Independent Living in Glasgow use a detailed checklist to help them ensure the accessibility of venues.

→ **Get it from CILIG on 0141 550 4455**

### **2. Information in alternative formats**

Are local information services aware of the range of alternative formats a disabled person may need and how to provide them quickly and efficiently? Could more be done to promote this issue – there is a wealth of information available on the best way to make information accessible – are providers aware of it? Are services making the best use of technology to provide alternative formats in a cost effective way? Could more be done to encourage providers to share resources and expertise – for example does local authority funding take account of the equipment used by providers and the training required to use it effectively?

#### **Theory into Practice**

UPDATE produce The Scottish Formats Resource, a directory of transcription and translation services.

→ **Get it from UPDATE, contact details on Page 15**



### **3. Sign language interpreters and other communication services**

Do you provide interpretation services? Are local information and advice providers aware of this service and entitled to use it? Have other ways of communicating with deaf and hard of hearing people been considered such as textphones, Typetalk, induction loop systems, Palantype and subtitled videos and email?

#### **Theory into Practice**

The City of Edinburgh Council produces a booklet called **Access to Information**. This gives guidelines to council staff on the issues and sets out the practical steps that can and should be taken to improve communication between members of staff and the public. Crucially, the information is local, detailed and practical.

→ **Get it from the Equalities Unit at the City of Edinburgh Council.  
Phone 0131 469 3603.**

### **4. Networking**

You need to encourage providers to network, to share information about what they can offer disabled people and to widen their knowledge of other services available locally. There should be an awareness by all information providers of these issues and where necessary, agree adequate referral and signposting arrangements.

#### **Theory into Practice**

Join or work with UPDATE, Scotland's National Disability Information Service. They provide mechanisms to distribute and share information more effectively.

→ **Phone UPDATE on 0131 558 5200**

## 5. **Standards**

The SAIF Standards are designed to take information and advice providers through a service review process that ensures that access to information becomes a reality for disabled people. The Standards are free and can be used alongside other quality assurance schemes. Local authorities have a significant role to play in promoting the use of Standards. They can do so in a number of ways – by highlighting the benefits of Standards through existing local networks; by creating situations where disabled people monitor and review services; by making it a condition of funding that services have a commitment to tackling these issues.

### **Theory into Practice**

The ***Grampian Accessible Information Taskforce*** was set up to develop a local, co-ordinated approach to accessible information. This was partly a local response to the national SAIF Standards. It included 3 local authorities, Grampian Health Board, Voluntary Sector and Disabled People's organisations.

→ **Get it from GAIT on [www.grampianinfo.co.uk/downloads/GAIT All Pages.pdf](http://www.grampianinfo.co.uk/downloads/GAIT%20All%20Pages.pdf)**

The SAIF Standards for Disability Information and Advice Provision in Scotland provide guidance to any agency on how to improve its provision of information to disabled people.

→ **Get it from SAIF, contact details on Page 1**

## **How to make it happen**

### **1. *Identify an officer responsible for leading the process***

This must be someone with sufficient authority and expertise to co-ordinate activity. The person will have to liaise with a wide variety of stakeholders who are already working to improve access in discrete subject areas i.e. housing, education, health. They will need the ability to determine ways in which strategy can be translated into implementation and result in tangible improvements to services.

### **2. *Assess the numbers and needs of disabled people in your area***

A great deal of work may already have been done by local agencies and organisations. Research what information has already been gathered and identify gaps in knowledge. Accept that lots of disabled people are not currently using services and plan for potential service users as well as existing ones.

### **3. *Prepare a plan***

Information and advice services will already be included in existing policy documents but it is unlikely that the specific information needs of disabled people have been comprehensively addressed. We are not suggesting that individuals or groups spend a huge amount of time reinventing the wheel. Rather, efforts would be better concentrated on mapping how well existing policies address disabled people's needs and identifying how improvements can be made.

### **4. *Help fund the process, and access other funding if necessary***

Information often takes second place to service provision. To be effective, it is a valid activity in its own right and should have dedicated funding. If you are serious about an accessible information strategy you need to spend money on it.

## **5. *Review progress regularly***

No matter how good your final strategy, it will need to be monitored, reviewed and adapted for the future. Plan in advance to make sure this happens. Include follow-up procedures as they are often forgotten and the momentum to deal with these issues lost.

## **6. *Tell people what you are doing***

It is important to gather information about disabled people and local agencies and invest time and energy in planning. However, it is equally important that the information gathered is effectively communicated to those who can improve services. In order for a local accessible information strategy to be developed and implemented it is vital that progress is reported to local authority and outside agencies' staff, organisations of and for disabled people and mainstream and specialist networks who can keep the lines of communication flowing.

Working through all of these steps will add value to your services. It will take time and effort on the part of your staff as well as the other agencies and individuals you seek to involve.

## People to work with

### **1. Organisations of disabled people and carers**

There is no substitute for the involvement of disabled people themselves. It is vital that agencies actively consult disabled people and involve them in the development of their service. This is not a particularly difficult thing to do but it can be time consuming and challenging. Use systems that are already there. Most services that interact with the public have mechanisms in place to receive feedback and deal with complaints. It is important that you view this activity in a positive light and encourage services to maximise the benefits of these systems. This is an important message to get across – and an activity that is ideally suited to, and enhanced by, local networking between service providers.

#### **Theory into Practice:**

The SAIF *Guide to User Led Service Review* is a practical guide to a user-led review or evaluation process that is designed to encourage disabled people to make demands on services and to participate in creating improvements. It has lots of ideas and tips on how to carry out an effective review process.

→ **Get it from SAIF, contact details on Page 1**

### **2. Mainstream and specialist information and advice providers.**

It is easy to get carried away when trying to cater more effectively for disabled people and forget that they are people first and disabled second. Like everyone else they need access to information and advice, sometimes related to their impairment, sometimes not. For this reason it is extremely important that you look at all the information and advice provision in your area that disabled people might want to use. This will mean looking at specialist agencies (e.g. The Princess Royal Trust for Carers Centres) and mainstream agencies (e.g. Citizens Advice Bureaux) as well as local disability organisations.

## Sources of further help

This section lists a number of useful contacts who can help you to implement the ideas suggested in this guide. It is not comprehensive but should provide a good starting point for those of you tackling the issues covered in **Barrier-Free Information**.

### **Scottish Accessible Information Forum (SAIF)**

*SAIF works to promote the rights of disabled people and carers to accessible information.*

C/o The Scottish Consumer Council

100 Queen Street

Glasgow G1 3DN

Tel: 0141 226 5261

Fax: 0141 221 0731

Text: 0141 226 8459

Email: [info@saifscotland.org.uk](mailto:info@saifscotland.org.uk)

**Website: [www.saifscotland.org.uk](http://www.saifscotland.org.uk)**

### **Update**

*Update collates and disseminates disability and impairment related information to front line information providers throughout Scotland.*

27 Beaverhall Road

Edinburgh EH7 4JE

Tel: 0131 558 5200

Fax: 0131 558 5201

Text: 0131 558 5202

Email: [info@update.org.uk](mailto:info@update.org.uk)

**Website: [www.update.org.uk](http://www.update.org.uk)**

### **Disability Rights Commission (DRC)**

*The DRC is an independent body established by Act of Parliament to eliminate discrimination faced by disabled people.*

DRC Helpline

FREEPOST

MID 02164

Stratford upon Avon

CV37 9BR

Tel: 08457 622 633

Fax: 08457 778 878

Text: 08457 622 644

Email: [enquiry@drc-gb.org](mailto:enquiry@drc-gb.org)

**Website: [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)**

## SAIF publications

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<b>Name of publication</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>How many copies?</b>
Standards for Disability Information and Advice Provision in Scotland	2004	82 pages A4	
A Brief Guide to the DDA – Rights of Access to Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises	2004	8 pages A4	
Making Information Accessible	2004	A3 poster	
Making Websites Accessible	2003	32 pages A4	
Guide to User Led Service Reviews	2003	20 pages A4	
Scottish Formats Resource	2003	108 pages A4	
What Disabled People Should Be Able To Expect From Disability Information and Advice Services	2000	10 pages A5	
Using An Information or Advice Service (Easy to Read)	2000	8 pages A5	

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