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**DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL - ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of the report is to update School Forum on the Accessibility Strategy development, consult with schools and to assess demand from school's for support to review and update their Accessibility Plans.
2. The statutory scope for the Strategy is for maintained schools (incl. nursery schools) and Pupil Referral Unit however, whilst the Council's duty extends to the schools for which it is responsible (above), within the principles of schools@onedarlington, the support as set out in the Strategy could be available in the form of a traded service, to all schools subject to need.
3. The draft Strategy is attached.

**Project Update and Next Steps**

4. The Strategy has been finalised to the point where it is ready for consultation. A task and finish group has been set up and has provided feedback on the Strategy as well as consultation and timescales.
5. Various lines of enquiry have been made to inform timescales. The earliest that the Strategy can be considered (allowing sufficient consultation time between December 2016 and February 2017), will be by Children's and Young People's Scrutiny on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2017 and Cabinet on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017.
6. Consultation will take place in January/early February with maintained settings, and will be extended to parents/carers of disabled children and young people at their schools. We have informally consulted with DAD and have extended invitations to them for meetings with relevant forum groups eg parent/carer forum and Young Leaders. Schools are asked to support in consultation with affected parents/carers, and disabled children/young people.
7. We would specifically like to ask for their views in relation to the barriers for improving access to the curriculum, environment and information.
8. Schools have been invited to send comments on the Strategy and/or to meet with the SF Officer and the Strategy Equality and Diversity Advisor on either 19<sup>th</sup> January and 2<sup>nd</sup> February (half hour meeting slots are bookable between 1pm – 5pm). This is an opportunity to ask any questions or give feedback on the Strategy in more detail.
9. Following consultation and a final refresh of the Strategy, the Children's Services Directorate Management Team will approve the Strategy prior to submission to the CYP Scrutiny and Cabinet meetings. Director approval for the Cabinet paper and accompanying Strategy is required by 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017.
10. The Strategy will be required to be monitored and governance will be set up to do this.

## Training for Maintained Schools and a Traded Service Opportunity for Academy Schools

11. In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, the DFE guidance for maintained schools explains that schools should publish their accessibility plan as part of the SEND information report on school's policy for children and young people with SEND; and Academies should ensure their accessibility plans are either a freestanding document or part of another document such as the school development plan. Schools should publish these documents online. (Reference DFE [www.gov.uk/guidance/what-maintained-schools-must-publish-online](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-maintained-schools-must-publish-online) and [www.gov.uk/guidance/what-academies-free-schools-and-colleges-should-publish-online](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-academies-free-schools-and-colleges-should-publish-online)).
12. ).
13. Schools must publish their Accessibility Plans on As reported previously to School Forum, a 'light touch' desk based review of all Darlington school websites was undertaken. indicated that it would appear not all schools are compliant with their duties to publish Accessibility Plans, including some maintained schools. A paper for school governing bodies was prepared in the Autumn term to support schools in the duty.
14. A training package has been scoped which will support the development of school's Accessibility Plan's. It is anticipated that the outcomes of the Accessibility Strategy consultation process will further inform the final training plan.
15. The training offer will be composed of 2.5-hour twilight sessions for maintained schools on a pre-booking basis, (dates will be advised). An audit tool will be provided which would be completed and then reviewed by Darlington Borough Council prior to training. Based on the responses, one of three packages will be offered to the school.  
  
**Bronze** – for those maintained schools who, on completion of the checklist, have identified significant gaps which indicate potential non-compliance and for which they require guidance.  
**Silver** – for those maintained schools, who, on completion of the checklist, have identified some gaps which would benefit from further guidance to achieve compliance.  
**Gold** - for those maintained schools who, on completion of the checklist, have identified potentially minor gaps which, when addressed, would support the schools in exceeding compliance.
16. The same process and training can also be made available to Academy schools.

### Recommendation

#### 17. The School Forum are asked to:

- note the timeline and resulting actions to develop the Strategy that can currently be tracked from 1 August 2016 evidencing a consistent record of progress;
- note that final approval of the Strategy is through Cabinet and for ratification by CYP Scrutiny, as per timescales set out in para 4;
- **note that the draft Strategy is available for consultation and all schools are encouraged to send comments by 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2016 and if appropriate to arrange to attend a consultation meeting as set out in para 8;**
- **note that Academy schools are asked to confirm interest in training as set out in paras 11-14.**

**Eleanor Marshall - School Forum Monitoring & Support Officer**