Access to Politics Charter

The Charter

1. We shall produce and publish a statement outlining how we will support disabled people's participation in every aspect of our activities.

2. We shall support and resource a disabled members' group within our party.

3. We shall commit to positive and proactive provision of disability equality training to elected officers, staff and party members.

4. We shall ensure that the language we use about 'disability' recognises it as a societal issue with societal solutions.

5. We shall investigate alternative means of participation such as remote presence and internal digital voting.

6. We shall voluntarily publish data on protected characteristics of our candidates in line with section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 for all elections, including Scottish local authority elections.

7. We shall investigate job-sharing for internal elected roles and for elected public office.

8. We shall actively support and encourage disabled people to stand for elected office and explore mechanisms that ensure the election of a representative number of disabled candidates.

Access to Politics Charter Guidance

Please note that this is for your guidance only and is not exhaustive. You will be signing up to the Charter points not the guidance points.

1. We shall produce and publish a statement outlining how we will support disabled people's participation in every aspect of our activities.

The statement is your party's written commitment to meeting disabled people's access and support requirements, and making disabled people's political participation a permanent part of your party's culture.

The statement should:

- Outline your party's accessibility policies – the formal rules you have put place to achieve your accessibility goals.
- List specific actions your party will take to prevent and remove barriers disabled people's participation, and when it will do so.
- Provide clear guidance on how disabled people can request access and support, identifying the individual(s) responsible for enforcing and carrying out these actions.

On publication the statement should be made available in accessible formats, such as Large Print, Audio, and Easy Read.

Inclusion Scotland Guides

Access to Local Branch Meetings
Accessibility Summary Checklist
Making Communications Accessible
guide Reasonable Adjustments Example
Sheet Speakers and Presentations
Checklist Venue Checklist

Useful Links

Accessible Formats – https://www.disabledaccessday.com/news/accessible-formats/

2.

We shall support and resource a disabled members' group within our party.

It is important to support and resource disabled members to organise a group within your party. Support means you should encourage and help with the initial networking of identifying disabled members to come together either at conference time or separately. Resource means you should provide the finance required for a meeting space, and cover reasonable adjustment costs so that meetings are inclusive.

A disabled members' group can provide peer support to disabled party members and work to advance the inclusion and full participation of disabled people within the party. A group can also be drawn on to provide insight from lived experience, to inform party policy and procedures to create greater understanding and inclusion, and promote solutions to the barriers disabled people face. This positions disabled people as part of the decision making process, and not simply the subjects of consultation.

Disabled people's lived experiences and expertise need to permeate throughout politics and public life in order to inform and implement the changes that create a more inclusive society.

3.

We shall commit to positive and proactive provision of disability equality training to elected officers, staff and party members.

Disability Equality Training is not the same as Disability Awareness Training.

Disability Awareness Training is often run by those with no lived experience of disability. It focuses on individuals' impairments, but can fail to consider how wider social attitudes towards disability affect disabled people.

Disability Equality Training recognises the distinction between impairment and disability – that those with impairments are often disabled by a failure to reduce the societal and environmental barriers they face. It teaches participants to identify and challenge discriminatory behaviours which can prevent disabled people's full participation in employment and other activities, and provides guidance on best practice and appropriate use of language. Disability Equality Training should always be provided by a person with lived experience of disability.

Disability Equality Training should be a positive educational experience, helping people to think and act in a more inclusive way. Disability Equality Training is suitable for all, and can be tailored to suit participants' and organisations' needs as required.

Useful Links

Equal Representation Coalition – Equal Representation in Politics toolkit – https://www.equalrepresentation.scot

4.

We shall ensure that the language we use recognises disability as a societal issue with societal solutions.

Achieving equality for disabled people will require a near-universal understanding that the barriers and factors which cause disabled people to have less choices and options than non-disabled people are almost entirely societal in nature. These barriers must be addressed through societal and attitudinal change, rather than being issues that the disabled people themselves can address for themselves alone.

It is essential to use language which positions the disability as a societal issue, rather than a medical one. The medical model views disability simply as an outcome of illness, inherited conditions and other negatively framed concepts, for which people need to be treated, managed, or cured. Instead, the social model of disability recognises that society is not designed to accommodate those with impairments, who often face barriers to their participation. If these barriers are removed, a person may still have an impairment but will not experience disability.

Under the social model, individuals with impairments are described as ‘disabled people’ rather than ‘people with disabilities.’ This language recognises individuals’ impairments and the possible need for reasonable adjustments, but positions the availability or lack of that adjustment as the reason for the barrier existing or not, rather than it merely being misfortune of the individual.

5.

We shall investigate alternative means of participation such as remote presence and internal digital voting.

For many disabled people, as well as for many carers and parents or just people who live in remote areas with poor transport options, being able to consistently attend a meeting physically in person can be difficult or even impossible.

If full participation and exerting of democratic membership rights in your party depends on being physically present at meetings, some individuals are always going to be excluded and disenfranchised. By putting in place the means for people to use technology to take part in meetings and voting, they will be more fully included and represented.

This will require appropriate equipment (e.g. a good internet connection or at least phone line, good audio equipment and chairing the meeting so that they are used effectively) and may also require you to change your rules for meetings to allow those present remotely to take part and vote.

6.

We shall voluntarily publish data on protected characteristics of our candidates in line with section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 for all elections, including Scottish local authority elections.

Disability is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. The Act protects people from discrimination in a wide range of situations, including the activities of associations such as political parties. The Act allows disabled people to be treated more favourably than non-disabled people without this being unlawful discrimination against non-disabled people.

Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 requires political parties to publish data on protected characteristics of all of their candidates at a relevant election. While this has not yet been enacted by the UK government, parties can disclose this information voluntarily. This would make parties more transparent about their diversity and where it needs to be strengthened.

Under this model, information would be published anonymously, and candidates can decline to disclose their protected characteristics to their party. Parties' provision of this information should not override individuals' right to privacy.

Useful Links

Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 –
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/

The Equality Act 2010: a guide for political parties
https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/equality-act-2010-guide-political-parties

7.

We shall investigate job-sharing for internal elected roles and for elected public office.

For many people with long term health conditions there can be a need to manage fatigue, and a period of time where their capacity to undertake work is reduced, in some cases in quite varied and unpredictable ways.

The nature of elected office generally places high expectations on the capacity of elected members, which can lead to some disabled people ruling themselves out, and to other people assuming they can't perform the role. Job-sharing is one way to overcome this barrier and avoiding a significant portion of society being excluded from holding elected office.

There are many examples of successfully implemented job-sharing within employment and within some elected structures (e.g. some parties, some trade unions). By allowing job-sharing as an option for people standing for internal roles, you can increase the diversity of those taking part – which can also benefit carers and parents who might otherwise feel they could not commit the time (particularly, and predominantly, women).

Making this change may require changes to your internal rules and procedures. Certain aspects of equality law already requiring "reasonable adjustments" are already felt by some law experts to imply that this should be made available for public office, but achieving clarity about implementing this will require legislation change and work to address the practicalities (none of which are insurmountable).

8.

We shall actively support and encourage disabled people to stand for elected office and explore mechanisms that ensure the election of a representative number of disabled candidates.

If your party is serious about increasing the number of disabled people running for elected office, there should be a specific internal campaign to ask for and encourage disabled people to put themselves forward for selection. Candidate training and mentorship is a great way to build capacity and confidence.

Even with this (and the implementation of other charter points) disabled people may still face an uneven playing field due to the additional barriers they face. The Scottish Government-funded Access to Elected Office Fund can fund additional impairment-related costs that a disabled person may face when running for selection and election, while the Access to Politics project provides support and advice to parties and disabled people.

There's still much more parties can do to increase disabled people's representation in elected roles. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has laid out how parties can improve disabled people's political participation in Part 1 of their report, *Equality Act 2010: a guide for political parties*.

Useful Links

The Equality Act 2010: a guide for political parties
https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/equality-act-2010-guide-political-parties
Access to Elected Office Fund – http://inclusionscotland.org/what-we-do/employability-and-civic-participation/access-to-politics/aeofs/
Access to Politics – http://inclusionscotland.org/what-we-do/employability-and-civic-participation/access-to-politics