

DISABILITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

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The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of St Philip and St Jacob, Bristol is a registered charity, number 1132006

‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full’ (John 10:10)

*“For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.*

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”(Psalm 139 13- 14)

Our commitment

As children of God, we have a new dignity and God calls us to fullness of life.

We are made in the image of God, and as such all people are of equal importance and significance.

We all, irrespective of our background or abilities, have a role to play in the practice and outworking of our faith. At Central we believe that as God’s family we have a responsibility to support and encourage all of those who we come across in their journey of faith.

Central is committed to sharing God’s love for all people, whom we believe are made by God in His image. The church aims to provide an environment in which the value and dignity of all members and visitors are respected.

Legal context

We are required in law to be aware of disability and the fact that this has a bearing on Central’s responsibility as a service provider and employer. As such the Equality Act (2010) states that the church must take reasonable steps to ensure that our policies, practices and procedures enable people with disabilities to enjoy and fully participate in all aspects of church life and work.

In law these things are not ‘voluntary concessions’. They are necessary obligations which are both legally and theologically imperative.

Definition of disability

The Equality Act 2010 gives a wide definition of disability:

A physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on an individual’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

This means that in addition to physical and sensory impairment, disability includes mental health issues and learning disabilities as well as ‘hidden’ illnesses such as epilepsy, diabetes, arthritis, autism and other conditions which may cause chronic pain. The broad nature of this definition means that we are likely to have a considerable number of people living with a condition which could be considered as a disability and we may not always be aware of it.



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Policy Aims

To find ways to appropriately recognise and support people so that in so far as possible there is no barrier, either in the built environment or relation to perceptions or attitudes, which would prevent people from encountering the Lord Jesus and participating fully in the life of Central.

Involvement

Strong emphasis is given in the legislation to involving disabled people in consultations about changes or developments to buildings. At Central we are committed to ensuring that in addition to consulting with those in the congregation, we also invite the wider community to have their say.

Action point: by the end of 2027 Central will have completed and implemented the findings of an accessibility audit with input from the Diocesan Disability Advisor.

Reasonable Adjustments

Churches are required to do all things reasonable to remove barriers to people with disabilities, or to provide services in a different way which makes them accessible, taking into account different needs.

'Reasonable' is not defined in the legislation, but it is generally accepted that in the church context comparative location access to funding and resources are a good measure of the lengths to which organisations would reasonably be expected to go in order to comply with legislation. Central recognises the unique gifting of its city centre location and the call to be a 'hub' for the surrounding community. We are striving to steward our resources in a way that ensures that current barriers to participation are addressed as matter of urgency. The most immediate example of this is the installation of level access door to the side extension. It is recognised that this will be an ongoing process which will require regular revision and re assessment throughout the current renovations and beyond.

Central recognises that potential barriers extend beyond access to the building. Central commits to take steps to remove or alter certain identified features (either physical or procedural) where necessary in order to ensure that our outreach, in its many different forms, is as accessible as possible. If an identified auxiliary aid or service would enable a person with disabilities to participate more fully, then Central will commit to providing such an aid or service.

Practical examples of how to implement this approach could include (but are not limited to):

1. Ensuring that there is a hearing loop available on request; and
2. Ensuring that all songs and PowerPoint displays used in a service are available in large print on request. One way to achieve this might be to invest in a tablet which could be set up to provide large print versions of text on request.

Anticipatory approach to need

Central recognises that the legislation requires us to be 'anticipatory' - we need to think ahead about who might come to our church, whether for a service or as a visitor or tourist, and how the needs of our present congregation may develop in the future. This approach is mirrored by the actions of Jesus who comes to meet us in our need and anticipates what we require even before we do!



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Leadership

Central are committed to nurturing and developing disciples, who following the example of Jesus will seek to humbly lead others closer to Him. Central recognises that people with disabilities and other needs have an equal role to play in this and may be called to take up some form of leadership role or ministry. Central actively acknowledges the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities have as much opportunity as others to develop in leadership and vocation.

Independence

The Equality Act upholds the principle that in relation to disability people should be enabled to be independent, where this is appropriate to the individual's age. A legitimate desire to help an individual to overcome a barrier should always be weighed up and wherever possible be carried out in a way that is safe and does not diminish the independence and dignity of the person.

Central commits to continuing to foster a culture of inclusivity and independence.

Legal Duties of the PCC

Central recognises that discussions and decisions about the above should be recorded in PCC minutes, to show that we are aware of our responsibilities and have taken all reasonable steps to meet them. We understand that it is advisable to record what steps we plan to take in the immediate, short and longer term. This plan will be important if you need to apply for a faculty as it will show that any work you are doing is part of a longer-term plan. Some examples are set out below:

Ongoing procedure and management

1. All staff members are charged with ensuring that this policy is implemented in the areas for which they are responsible, and for bringing to the attention of the Church Manager any work which needs to be done to improve access and use
2. The Parochial Church Council will receive annually (or at the point of need) a report from the Church Manager on work which needs to be done in implementation of this policy.
3. The policy outlined above will be reviewed by the Parochial Church Council on an annual basis. The next review is due in September 2023
4. Queries in relation to the above should be referred to the Church manager and/ or a member of the safeguarding team

Appendix 1:

Principles and Pointers on inclusion as set out by the Churches inclusion Charity, Through the Roof:

- Welcoming and being open to disabled people so they feel they 'belong'
- Offering reserved parking/a drop-off point
- Having 'step-free' access giving level/ramped entry to a building
- Providing accessible toilets
- Having a loop system in operation and, when required, providing sign language interpreters and/or speech-to-text (captioning)
- Using straightforward, jargon-free language
- Supplying written information (including that on a screen) in large print (font size 18 point) and other alternative formats (e.g. audio, electronic, Braille)
- Ensuring that there are clear/pictorial signs (for people with learning disabilities)
- Having a quiet space available during the main meeting for those who may need time-out (for people on the autistic spectrum)
- Having good, even, glare and flicker-free lighting to benefit people with sight loss or autism
- Offering seating (some with arms) near the entrance/exit
- Providing a named contact to 'champion' issues and initiate training on disability
- Speaking directly to disabled people, assuming nothing and asking them how they are best supported and included
- Ensuring there is commentary/audio description for purely visual content to those unable to see the screen/stage
- Ensuring the website is accessible and has information that helps disabled people access the building and activities
- Adopting a can-do culture with an inclusive ethos, valuing all and addressing each person's needs on an individual basis
- Intentionally encouraging and enabling people with disabilities to contribute to church life using their God-given gifts