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**A Disabled Activist's
Guide to being a
Labour Party
Disability Officer**

**The Job Description
and the Role of a
Disability Officer**

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Disability Officer - Job Description

The Disability Officer - DO is the key representative of disabled members within the CLP or within a Branch. They work to ensure any disabled member who wishes to do so is enabled to be involved in campaigning and other CLP activities.

DOs also make sure that disabled members feel the issues and concerns they raise are heard, understood and respected.

DOs are strongly encouraged to be members of Disability Labour, which provides useful advice and a network of support for all disabled members.

It is important that DOs are familiar with the Equality Act 2010 and how it applies to the Labour Party. All the information you need is in the DEAL Legal Guide, The Equality Act 2010 and the Labour Party.

It can be downloaded in various formats from:
<http://disabilityequalityactlabour.org>

The Disability Officer has six main responsibilities:

1. Representing disabled members of the CLP.
2. Educating CLP Officers and members, including local Councillors about the Equality Act 2010 via Disability Equality Training.
3. Working with CLP Officers to ensure the CLP does not breach the Equality Act 2010
4. Working with CLP Officers to ensure that all CLP meetings and events are fully accessible to disabled members
5. Working with the CLP Chair and Secretary to ensure communications are sent out to members and voters in accessible formats
6. Setting up and running a Disability Forum for disabled members.

The role of the DO is one that requires good organisational skills and the ability to get on with lots of different people who will have a wide range of disabilities. Remember that many people have invisible disabilities, it is just as important to include them in LP activities. There will be some people who despite their disabilities, do not necessarily identify as being disabled. You will often find that once people with hidden disabilities see that there is an active and supportive disabled members forum in the CLP they will decide to come and join and share their experiences and frustrations.

Disability Officer - Job Description

As well as the six key tasks above there are many things a DO can do to ensure greater participation for disabled people at CLP meetings and events.

Bringing disabled members together to empower each other, is a key responsibility. DOs can support disabled members to learn the skills needed to get involved with party activity. This could involve training around writing motions for discussion, learning how to be a confident speaker or teaching members how to navigate the Labour Party website and membersnet.

Building an inclusive party is vital to every CLP. All members should feel welcome and their contributions valued.

DOs and Disabled Members are uniquely placed to have the lived experience, knowledge and skills to help build local campaigns to improve the lives of disabled people living within in the CLP and the wider community.

Remember that many disabled people will know what adjustments they require to be able to fully participate in their CLP events. Just ask what somebody needs and they will usually be able to tell you. Listen to what they say so that you get it right first time! Check back if you are unsure of something so that there is no confusion about what is needed.

These are some of the things that DOs do:

- Work with the CLP secretary to ensure all communications going out to members via email or in the post are accessible for members who may have a visual impairment. This may mean making sure some members receive emails in plain text.
- Some disabled members will find it easier to read papers in larger print or on different coloured paper. Ask members what they need so that you can be sure that the CLP provides meeting minutes, agendas and other paperwork in a format disabled members can read. You will probably find other members of the CLP will be grateful for documents in larger print. Arial 14 or 16 point bold is often a good choice but check with the person who needs the Reasonable Adjustment to make sure it will work for them.

Disability Officer - Job Role

- All CLP and branch meetings must be fully accessible for disabled people. It is the responsibility of the venue owners to provide ramps or other adaptations that are needed. In some instances it may be possible for a small portable ramp to be used. If you want advice on accessibility issues or how to make your CLP meetings more accessible contact Disability Labour who will be able to advise you.
- Using a PA system helps those with a hearing impairment to hear and understand what is happening in a meeting. Make sure the volume is at a suitable level and people using the microphone do not shout into it as that can cause severe pain to somebody wearing a hearing aid.
- Some rooms for hire have a hearing loop. Make sure you understand how it works. Often hearing loops will not cover the whole room and you will need to advise people with a hearing impairment to sit in a particular place. Your CLP can buy a hearing loop. The RNID will be able to give good advice regarding the types available. Hearing loops can be affected by nearby mobile phones, so make sure whoever sets up the loop knows about this.
- Social events should be fun and also fully accessible. You should make sure you work with the officers organising events to enable all disabled members are able to attend any event should they wish to do so. This will include giving advice about suitable venues and having a two tier ticket pricing system, so nobody is excluded because they are on a low income
- You may need to give advice about dietary requirements or allergies. Make sure members give you clear information so food can be properly labelled. It is especially important to ensure that any food which may contain nuts **MUST** be clearly labelled. If you have members with severe allergies make sure you know what assistance they may need.

When it comes to campaigning, there are lots of ways to involve disabled members. There are separate guides to canvassing and campaigning which are available directly from Disability Labour.

If you are organising information stalls, disabled members may find that this is a good way to connect with voters. You should make sure there is suitable seating available and the tables are at wheelchair height.

Disability Officer - Job Sharing

Now that many Branch and CLP roles can be shared, the DO role can also be a joint role. It is good practice for the DO to be disabled person, but where the role is shared one of the job share pair could be a family carer of a disabled person.

When you are thinking of doing a job share, be sure you know the other person well. Work out how you will share the role, so if there is an election for the post you can explain to your comrades why you are the best candidates.

Good communication between job-shares is the key to success

At CLP Executive Committee Meetings only one of the DOs can vote, even if you both attend the meeting. If there is a vote and you cannot agree on which way to vote, you should abstain.

Running Forums

Setting up a Disabled Members Forum is a really good way to begin to encourage disabled members to get involved in CLP activities. It can also be a good way to write motions for discussion on issues that are relevant to disabled people.

Your CLP should be responsible for funding such meetings. It is not acceptable to expect disabled people who are on low or fixed incomes to bear the costs of attending the forum. The forum can also be a great way of teaching people how to get the best out of the Labour party website. Forums can also be used as a way of discussing policy issues and contributing to Labour Party policy commissions.

It is important to recognise that some disabled members may need a carer or enabler to help them participate in meetings. This is a Reasonable Adjustment and should be facilitated.

You may find those who are family carers of disabled people may wish to set up a Carers Forum. Ideally this should not be run by the DO. Carers, just as much as disabled people, need their own space and someone who is a family carer may be the best person to lead the Forum.

Forum meetings must not be used as a reason to exclude disabled members from other CLP meetings or events.

Disability Officer - Inclusive Activism

If you are looking for a speaker for your Forum, ask Disability Labour and we can suggest someone who can give a talk or lead a discussion.

Linking up with disability activist groups within your CLP is a really good way, not only to recruit new Labour party members, but also to support local and national disability campaigning.

Disabled members often have skills that would enable them to take on other roles in the CLP. Part of the role of DO is to encourage these members to stand for office. As many CLP roles can now be job shared this is an excellent way of involving more people in running the CLP.

Disability Labour has a lively and interesting Facebook Forum, it gives DOs contact with each other to share ideas and good practice.

We hope you have found this guide helpful, if you have any ideas for adding to it or improving it, please contact info@disabilitylabour.org.uk