

Local Authority Charter

Briefing for EDCM supporters

What is the EDCM Local Authority Charter?

The Charter is a set of voluntary commitments that local authorities can make to show that disabled children and their families matter. The Charter is signed by Lead Members for Children’s Services (elected Councillors). It commits local authorities to provide a range of services, and also to addressing the needs of disabled children in their strategic planning. Currently, the Charter only covers English local authorities, reflecting the differences in the UK nations following devolution.

You can use the Charter as a starting point to drive up the standard of services for disabled children and their families in your area – this factsheet will give you some ideas about how to do this.

What can EDCM supporters do to promote the Charter?

1) Contact your Lead Member directly:

EDCM supporters in England can lobby their local authorities to sign up to the Charter. The Charter must be agreed and signed by the Lead Member for Children’s Services (or equivalent), who must also agree and insert a delivery date (at the latest 31 December 2009) and then send the signed Charter back to the campaign.

The easiest way to do this is through the online action on the EDCM campaign website – go to www.edcm.org.uk and click on ‘Get Involved’.

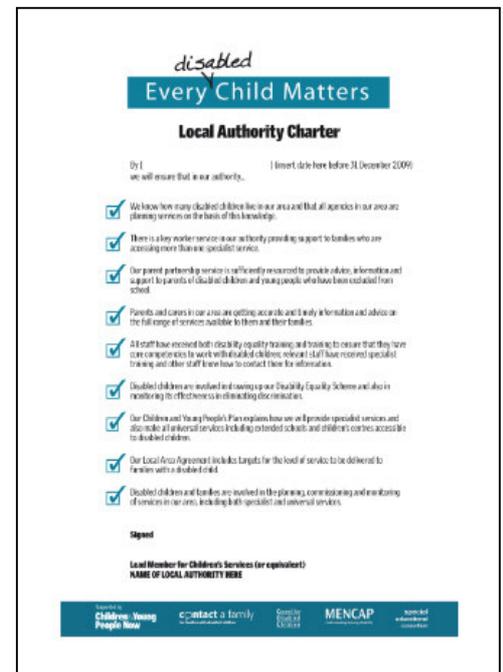
Alternatively, you can find out the name of your local authority (or county council or unitary authority) by entering your postcode in the search engine at <http://local.direct.gov.uk/LDGRRedirect/Start.do?mode=1>. You can then find the name of your Lead Member for Children’s Services (or equivalent) on your local authority website, and contact them directly.

You need to be aware that in some parts of the country, there are two levels of local government – district and county councils. If you live in one of these areas, you need to ask your county council to sign up, as they have responsibility for children’s services.

2) Create pressure locally for your Local Authority to sign:

A range of key local decision-makers can influence whether or not a local authority signs up to the Charter. The names and titles of professionals and services will vary between local areas, but some of these will include:

- Director of Children’s Services
- Manager of Disabled Children’s social care team
- Manager of the Special Educational Needs service
- Manager of Children’s Information Service
- Manager of Parent Partnership Service



There will also be key professionals within health agencies such as the Primary Care Trust in similar roles, and in bodies that bring agencies together such as children's trusts and children and young people's strategic partnerships.

Actions you can take to encourage your local authority to sign up include:

- Arrange a meeting with groups of local parents to discuss what elements of the Charter are most important in your area, and make a plan to show how you think the local authority can deliver those elements. This is particularly helpful if Councillors are being advised by officers that the Charter is too ambitious.
- Write to your Lead Member or Director of Children's Services to highlight other Local Authorities near you who have signed up. The names of these Local Authorities are on the EDCM website (www.edcm.org.uk/lacharter).
- Arrange a meeting with the Lead Member or Director of Children's Services, to discuss the Charter and explain the need to prioritise disabled children locally. EDCM has a template campaign presentation that we can send you – email info@edcm.org.uk
- Try to get the Charter onto the agenda for a meeting of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board, or another relevant meeting. You, or a professional you trust, could talk the Board about the Charter.

Other actions you might want to consider include:

- Talk to local media contacts about the Charter and why your local authority should sign – but always remember that the media has their own agenda, so think about how they might present your story. Consider local newspapers, TV and radio stations.
- Get parent and voluntary organisations to put articles about the campaign and the Charter in local newsletters. EDCM has sample text – email us as info@edcm.org.uk
- Talk to opposition Councillors – from the political party who are not running the Local Authority. If you can get the opposition parties to support the Charter, this can put more pressure on your Lead Member to sign up.
- Approach your MP to ask them to support the campaign and lobby your Local Authority to sign the Charter. You might want to arrange to meet them at their local Surgery.
- Get children and young people's voices heard – perhaps through a group meeting or making a DVD.

We have found that parent groups tend to get a more positive response from the local authority if they offer to work constructively with them to see what steps they need to take in order to be able to sign the Charter. This need not require much of your time – possibly an initial meeting to share ideas, with a follow-up meeting a month or two later. You could also point out to your Local Authority that if they sign up to the Charter, EDCM can help them with press releases that will generate positive publicity.

3) Once signed up, support your Local Authority to deliver on their commitments

This is the tricky part – and of course the most important part. It can be (relatively) easy to persuade local authorities to sign up to charters and other voluntary commitments. The hard part is making sure that they deliver on these commitments.

If (when!) your local authority signs up after all your work to persuade them, make clear to the people you have been in contact with that you will be expecting to see genuine steps taken to deliver the Charter commitments.

Case study - delivering the commitments in the Charter locally

Sunderland signed up to the Charter and developed an implementation plan to show how it will meet the objectives by the deadline of January 2008. The plan and the Charter were endorsed by both the Children's Trust (bringing together the local authority with health agencies) and the Executive Management Team of the local authority.

The plan outlines the current position in the area against each objective, and the actions that the local authority is taking to meet its objective. An example is below.

Objective: 'We know how many disabled children live in our area and that all agencies in our area are planning services on the basis of this knowledge.'

- *Example:* Agencies responsible for disabled children use a shared definition of disability and there is a multi-agency database of information on disabled children in the local area.

Before signing the Charter, Lead Members must insert a delivery date (at the latest 31 December 2009). But of course, by signing up the authority is accepting in principle that these objectives are correct – so you can and should expect to see your authority acting according to the spirit of the Charter from the moment they sign up.

Actions you can take to make sure that your Local Authority delivers on their commitments:

- Put out a press release when your Local Authority signs up so that local media highlight this new commitment – email info@edcm.org.uk for a template media release.
- Write to your Lead Member or Director for Children's Services asking if the Local Authority will produce a delivery plan for the Charter. If there is a delivery plan, ask if it is a public document, or if not, if you can share it in confidence locally and with the EDCM team.
- Try to get the Charter as a standing agenda item on any local planning boards you may be involved with, asking Officers to report to the board on progress towards delivering the objectives.