



Equalities Committee
19 February 2018

**Report from the Director of
Performance, Policy and
Partnerships**

**A Review of the Accessibility of Council Services for
Disabled Residents**

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	One: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evidence Collected from Departments
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the findings of a review commissioned by the previous Equalities team on the accessibility of frontline Council services.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Equalities Committee notes the contents of this review, and agrees that a survey of residents and users with disabilities is undertaken to understand their experience of frontline services.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 In 2016, the Committee considered an item on the accessibility of the Civic Centre for people with disabilities, as well as another on online accessibility of services. Following on from this, the 2017/18 Equality Action Plan included an action to establish a cross-council Task and Finish working group to map out and assess the accessibility of Council services for customers with disabilities, and work in partnership with relevant local community organisations to agree recommendations to address identified inconsistencies and gaps.

- 3.2 The first part of this work was undertaken by the previous Equalities team, and an officer was recruited on a temporary basis to carry out a review to ascertain the levels of accessibility of Council services. This was done through meeting and corresponding with officers and managers. The evidence gathered is set out in Appendix 1, along with observations from the services in question and possible activity which could be undertaken to improve accessibility.
- 3.3 There were few or no substantive issues identified for areas in the Environmental Services Directorate, Planning & Building Control, Housing, and Adults Social Care. The Children and Young People's Department may wish to consider engagement and communication with community groups, and in a range of languages, to raise awareness of its services for children with disabilities, as well as continuing to review the Local Offer website to make sure that services are easy to find and understand.
- 3.4 The Employment and Skills service is advised to provide more classes inclusive of learners with disabilities, as well as to ensure staff and tutors are regularly undertaking disability awareness training. In Customer Services, the review also identified the need to ensure up-to-date disability awareness training, as well as to ensure that the impacts of changes to the benefits system are communicated to people with disabilities in a timely fashion and the full implications for them are understood. It also made recommendations around braille and British Sign Language communication.
- 3.5 For Public Health and Cultural Services, there is a wide range of options to make libraries and sports centres and provision more accessible to people with disabilities, from investing in assistive equipment to closer consultation and engagement with disabled users, training and qualifications for staff. However, it is recognised that implementing some of these would have resource implications for these services.
- 3.6 The review has also made a number of overarching potential recommendations which might further improve engagement with disabled residents. These include:
- Ensuring a joined-up approach between departments and sharing information so there is awareness of the needs of disabled residents (whilst ensuring data protection rules are followed). In particular, Adult Social Care will have detailed knowledge on residents who have extra support needs, which could be useful for other teams in tailoring their services, and would avoid residents having to disclose repeatedly.
 - Surveying disabled residents accessing different services to ascertain their levels of satisfaction and provide customer feedback. This information could help improve services.
 - Developing and maintaining a resource which provides information on the accessible services available for disabled residents (though this would have a cost implication, including ensuring it is kept up to date).
 - Ensuring ongoing training for all staff to ensure there is a good understanding of equality and diversity including understanding the legal responsibility to make reasonable adjustments for disabled residents and customers.

3.7 It should be recognised that the findings of this review are preliminary, and the decisions around implementing improvement activities will be subject to further detailed analysis and consultation with the relevant services. However, the first step will be undertaking a survey of disabled residents and service users, and plans for this are set out below.

BSL Charter

3.8 The Council is also considering signing up to the BSL Charter, as per the 2017/18 Equalities Action Plan. In order to be eligible it must commit to at least three of the below five pledges and evidence its commitment via a self-assessment process, in partnership with the local deaf community. It must also demonstrate its commitment to improve on the remaining pledges. The five key pledges to improve access and rights for deaf people who use sign language are:

- Consult formally and informally with the local Deaf community on a regular basis
- Ensure access for Deaf people to information and services
- Support Deaf children and families
- Ensure staff working with Deaf people can communicate effectively using British Sign Language
- Promote learning and high quality teaching of British Sign Language.

3.9 While the cost of signing the pledge is small a, there would be resource implications, including but not limited to:

- the self-assessment and evidence gathering process, which would require the establishment of a cross-council working group and engagement with external stakeholders (including a mystery shopping exercises to identify any gaps);
- arrangements to address the identified gaps and areas of improvement;
- communication with and training of employees (e.g. Deaf Awareness, Basic BSL interpreting, etc), particularly frontline staff to ensure a consistent approach is applied across the council; and
- regular review of progress against each of the pledges and ongoing engagement with the deaf community in Brent and celebration of achievements.

3.10 Some evidence has been gathered in the course of this review regarding provision for deaf residents, and the gaps and areas of improvement (as per the second point above). However, it is again very preliminary and insufficient at this stage to determine clearly whether or not signing up to the Charter is feasible or desirable. Further work would be needed to do so, and this is reflected in the update on the Equalities Action Plan.

Next Steps

- 3.11 The next stage will involve a survey of people with disabilities to gauge their views and experiences of the accessibility of council services. This will be carried out online for a period of four weeks, scheduled at the time of writing to launch on 15 February 2018. The consultation will be publicised via relevant Council channels, and brought to the attention of service-users through our partners at CVS Brent, Volunteering Brent, and through the Disability Forum.
- 3.11 In addition, other recent surveys of users with disabilities will be drawn upon, including those carried out by the council's Facilities, Customer Services and Communications teams. Following review of these findings, relevant actions will be incorporated into the 2018/19 Equalities Action Plan.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications of this review itself. Financial implications of particular actions will be considered when these are being recommended for implementation.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Equality Act 2010 places specific duties on public sector bodies to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment, advance equality of opportunity and increase community cohesion. This review seeks to ensure that the Council is undertaking the first two parts of this by ensuring equitable access to services for disabled people and putting in place reasonable adjustments which is a legal requirement.

6.0 Equality Implications

- 6.1 This review was undertaken in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010. In particular, this review seeks to ensure that the provision of Council services does not lead to unlawful discrimination against disabled residents. This would be the case if they are unable to access any Council services. The review also seeks to advance equality of opportunity for disabled residents by looking at what departments can specifically do to remove the barriers disabled people may experience in accessing employment and other services.

7.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

- 7.1 The report includes the findings following a desktop audit only and feedback from our front line teams.
- 7.2 In the next stage, the Council will engage with service users via a four-week consultation that will be launched on 15 February 2018.

8.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

- 8.1 There are no staffing or accommodation implications of this review itself. Financial implications of particular actions will be considered when these are being recommended for implementation.

Report sign off:

PETER GADSDON

Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships.