



Equalities Committee

12 October 2015

Report from the Strategic Director Regeneration & Growth

Information

Wards affected:
ALL

Update on Accessibility Improvements to the Civic Centre

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the access related works undertaken to the Civic Centre since opening in 2013 to further improve the high level of accessibility to the building based on practical usage and feedback from residents, relevant groups and users of the building.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the report and the series of improvement works undertaken to date
- 2.2 To note the improvements programmed for the future and the process by which feedback received by building users will be received, considered and addressed.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 Brent Civic Centre was built in 2013. The move to a single, multi-use building brought together over 2,300 members of staff from across 14 council buildings. The aim of the Civic Centre was to streamline the efficient delivery of services to Brent's diverse community.

The building is officially recognised as the greenest public building in the UK through its BREEAM 'Outstanding' accreditation. Its purpose is not only to accommodate the council's departments, employees and Members but also to provide a range of facilities that benefit local residents and attract businesses to the borough. It comprises council offices, a customer services centre,

registration and nationality facilities, a new flagship central library and learning centre, a civic hall, a community hall, a winter garden, wedding and conference facilities and state of the art training facilities.

In commissioning the build of the Civic Centre the council aimed to improve the users' experience by providing accessible and comfortable services and spaces under one roof, and to demonstrate cost effective and practical solutions to increasing accessibility and reducing carbon emissions. It is designed to enhance the working environments for staff, members and visitors and to enable new ways of working for council staff such as flexible working and hot-desking.

- 3.2 The building was designed by Hopkins Architects who engaged an accessibility specialist throughout the building design process and the building is compliant with DDA requirements and other relevant legislation.
- 3.3 Post building occupancy and following feedback from certain groups the Council engaged an external specialist company, Direct Access Consultancy to carry out a full review of the building from an accessibility perspective (both physical and mental) in August 2014. Since the audit, consultation and engagement has also taken place with the Dementia Awareness Group, The Disability Forum as well as acting on feed back provided by building users through the building user survey and staff suggestion feedback.
- 3.4 The access audit highlighted a range of positive aspects of the Civic Centre and also areas in which there should be improvement. Examples of positive findings include accessible routes from the parking area, wide doors throughout the building, exceptionally well lit customer areas, step free access and visual and audible alarm systems.
- 3.5 The areas where improvements could be made within the building were set out in recommendations with timescales between 12 months and 5 years for implementation. These are generally beyond the requirements of DDA and some beyond the Council's ownership and outside of the Civic Centre building. However it was acknowledged certain elements would further enhance the user experience of the building overall. Officers therefore undertook an evaluation of the recommendations and following this carried out an exercise to prioritise those works. As a consequence, in March 2015, a sum of £75,000 was secured to implement these works over the time frame set out in the audit and to be addressed as part of a wider Civic Centre Development Programme. Outstanding items still to be implemented will be shared with the Equalities Team or other recommended body before progression to ensure improvements achieve the desired objective.
- 3.6 To date many improvements have been delivered in the building, inline with the recommendations and timescales set out in the audit report and the attached schedule (Appendix A) provides further detail, along with other works planned or anticipated for the future, some of which will be subject to funds being made available. The Audit identified areas of 'high priority' and elements of the Civic Centre Development Programme improvement works have taken this into account. These include:

- Installation of a specialist 'Changing Places' toilet which is publically advertised and which has many more features than a standard accessible toilet facility.
- signage improvements, particularly in the public areas of the building.
- Improvements to signage from Wembley Park Station installed in partnership with TFL.
- RADAR key access implemented to public accessible WC facilities.
- IT stations in customer service areas made height adjustable to aid wheelchair users or people of short stature.
- Implementation of a dedicated customer waiting area in the foyer with accessible seating.

All staff have been kept abreast of changes and decisions made as a result of the Access Audit through regular internal communication.

3.7 Further to recommendations made in the access audit, options for the possible accelerated delivery of the following items was made in September 2015:

- Colour contrasting solution for pillars within the public areas of the building
- Library and main disabled access doors – push button access on the outside.
- Feasibility for regular staircase to replace the spiral staircase in the customer service area.

Work to take these items forward has started with the aim of developing some options by the end of October 2015 and feasibility of re-engaging the buildings architect, Hopkins to help with the design aspects is being progressed.

3.8 The Civic Centre is a highly accessible building and one which Brent can rightly be proud of. Two high profile disability events have been successfully held in the building in the first two years of occupation. Brent Civic Centre has also recently been nominated at the Disability Smart Awards in the 'Premises' category and the outcome is awaited.

3.9 We will continue to seek ways to improve the building for our residents, visitors and staff through feedback channels and intend to carry forward work in a structured way where suggestions for improvements are considered in the context of the wider use of the building and decisions taken balancing the necessity of the proposals and cost and feasibility of undertaking the work.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 A budget has been identified for Civic Centre Improvement works and to date all such works have been within budget.

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 The building is compliant with DDA requirements and other relevant regulations.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the council has a duty to consider and make reasonable adjustments to its services, facilities and practices for disabled people, including Deaf people, people with partial or full sight loss, people with Learning Disabilities, etc. The duty is anticipatory and continuing which means that the organisation must proactively think in advance and on an ongoing basis about what disabled people with a range of impairments might reasonably need in order to remove any disadvantage faced by them.

The council must therefore ensure that its premises are as far as practically possible accessible to disabled staff, Members and visitors with disabilities. While not all adjustments will be considered reasonable, the council must be able to demonstrate that it has proactively considered all available options and can objectively justify its decision not to implement certain adjustments.

Any future suggestions for accessibility related improvements made by building users will be considered and where identified for progression, these will be shared with the Council's Equalities Team.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 7.1 Staff considerations for improvements across the building are taken into account through a number of channels. Generally suggestions for building improvements can be made through the staff suggestion scheme or via the regular Civic Centre Stakeholder Group meetings with suggestions that are approved for delivery funded from the Civic Centre development programme.
- 7.2 It is anticipated that the identified work will be carried out within existing staffing resources.

Background Papers

Appendix 1 - Accessibility Audit Progress Tracker

Contact Officers

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