

Disability Working Group

Tuesday, 30th January, 2024

DISABILITY WORKING GROUP HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

- Members present: Councillor McMullan (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors McAteer and Smyth.
- Also attended: Councillor R. Brooks.
- In attendance: Mrs. N. Largey, City Solicitor;
Mr. R. Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer;
Ms. J. Beck, Sign Language Interpreter;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Ms. W. Kane, Tourism Development Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Doherty.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 10th October, 2023 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Changing Places Policy Update

The Language Officer provided the Working Group with an update on the Motion that called for the introduction of a Changing Places Toilet Policy.

He reported that the draft policy had been approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 24th November, 2023 and that a public consultation had commenced on 26th January, 2024.

He stated that a survey had been published on the Your Say website and that the public consultation would end on 22nd April, 2024 and a report would be brought to the Working Group and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, that would outline the findings from the public consultation.

The Working Group noted the update.

Disability Advisory Panel Update

The Language Officer provided an overview of the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Disability Advisory Panel meeting with members of this Working Group.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

At the last Members Disability Working Group meeting on 10th October 2023, it was agreed that the members of this Working Group would meet the Disability Advisory Panel at their next meeting on 4th December 2023.

It was also agreed that this would be an arrangement of two meetings per year with the Disability Advisory Panel.

4.0 Disability Advisory Panel meeting on 4th December 2024

4.1 Update

The Members of this Working Group were introduced to the Disability Advisory Panel. Content was provided by Sarah Williams, Governance & Compliance Manager on the functions of the Members Disability Working Group and explained that the Working Group would like to meet Disability Advisory Panel twice per annum,

Members of the Disability Working Group stated the most important part of these meetings is the reassurance that Belfast City Council understands the daily struggles faced and know what is being said, hearing solutions for themselves.

Councillor Ross McMullan, the Chair of the Disability Working Group provided context on how the elected members working group works.

One of the Disability Advisory Panel members explained an ongoing issue with the fuse in the disabled toilet located in City Hall. The issue was raised at the last meeting and noticed the same issue is occurring. Councillor Ruth Brooks and Sarah Williams agreed to raise again with the maintenance team.

Councillor Ruth Brooks questioned at the meeting about what the easiest way was to contact Belfast City Council if a Council facility is faulty. The Disability Advisory Panel responded positively. They collectively agreed that Michael Johnston, the Language Officer was excellent in responding to queries via email as well as emailing the Equality inbox.

Furthermore, Councillor Ruth Brooks suggested drafting a proposal to rate issues that they face in Belfast. The Disability Advisory Panel would outline where they want to be and what they want to see. This could be discussed during a mapping out session.

4.2 Next steps:

The Disability Advisory Panel will meet on 13th March 2024 to carry out a mapping out exercise, rating issues that they have and outlining what they would like to see delivered by the Council.

The findings of the mapping out exercise will be shared with the Disability Members Working Group and further discussions to be held at an arranged meeting in June 2024 between the Disability Advisory Panel and the Members Disability Working Group.

5.0 Financial & Resource Implications

N/A

6.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications

N/A.”

The Working Group noted the report.

Disability Learning and Development Update

The Language Officer explained that, during the drafting of the new Disability Action Plan 2022-25, discussions had been held with the Equality and Diversity Network and it had been agreed that the Council’s Equality and Diversity Unit, Human Resources, Customer Hub and Facilities Management would be responsible for the implementation of introducing a number of communication tools for people with learning disabilities at customer centres within the Council that included becoming an Autism NI Impact Champion and a Jam Card Partner.

He stated that sign language courses would be rolled out to identified Council staff and that an Autism NI Impact Champion training programme had been delivered to staff

from City Hall, Malone House and Belfast Castle and that each venue had drafted a three-year action plan to become an Autism NI Impact Award Champion.

He reported that each venue had established a working group to monitor progress and implementation of the action plans. He added that arrangements had been made with the NOW Group to deliver JAM Card training to front line staff at City Hall, Belfast Castle and Malone House to create a team of JAM Card Champions to support colleagues with their understanding and address any barriers for people with disabilities of communication barriers.

The Working Group noted the update.

Accessible Tourism Programme

The Tourism Development Officer outlined the following report to the Working Group:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

The purpose of this report is to update members on the Belfast Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Programme 2023 to 2024. Members are encouraged to promote the programme to tourism and hospitality businesses and build momentum to support the objectives of the programme.

2.0 Main report

Strategic context

The Belfast Agenda’s vision is of ‘A city that people dream to visit.’ Make Yourself at Home, the city’s tourism strategy, aims to extend ‘Belfast’s reputation as a welcoming city to ensure inclusivity of all potential visitors,’ recognising accessible and inclusive tourism as a gap and opportunity that should be co-designed with the tourism sector and disability representatives.

Disabled tourism is a significant opportunity for the city. The purple pound is an untapped market worth £249 billion to the UK economy. As a market, disabled people tend to be loyal and make decisions based on word of mouth and reputation, which means good experiences are more likely to attract disabled tourists to stay longer, do more, come back and recommend Belfast to a friend.

Furthermore, the benefits of having tourism infrastructure befitting disabled tourists are cross-cutting, supporting a wide range of Belfast Agenda priorities, from an inclusive economy to health inequalities. Ramps, lifts, toilets, and seating can help buggies, prams and families enjoy our festivals, events, and leisure facilities. Disabled tourists bring the purple pound in to the city, boosting the economy and creating jobs.

First phase of the inclusive tourism programme

In 2022/23, Belfast City Council engaged with Visit Belfast and Open Arts to deliver an inclusive tourism programme that aimed to help businesses make minor changes in the way they communicate with disabled customers. It included research and consultation, online and in-room training and a living library. The end-phase report recommended that the programme should continue to be disability-led, foregrounding lived experience, and there should be:

- Increased marketing and promotion
- Further training through existing networks (such as the Festivals Forum and Food Network)
- Training relevant to different disabilities (in particular Autism, hearing loss and visual impairment) and contexts (such as travel and transport)
- Civic initiatives such as a city access guide or promotional campaign targeting disabled visitors

Belfast City Council identified five objectives to achieve through the accessible and inclusive tourism programme.

1. Motivate tourism businesses to improve accessibility through education and training
2. Improve and develop tourism products to meet the requirements of people with disabilities
3. Ensure staff employed in the tourism sector are access aware and have the key skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of people with disabilities
4. Provide quality information on facilities and services that people with disabilities can easily access to make informed choices
5. Increase consumer awareness of the accessibility of Belfast and its tourism experiences

Contributing to these objectives, it developed a programme that would include several supporting projects:

1. An accessible tourism seminar
2. Online training and toolkits
3. Living Library training workshops
4. Promotional best practice educational video
5. Authentic and real accessible itineraries based on recommendations from local disabled people

Approach to phase 2

Based on research and findings during phase 1, Council will bring together best practice from the tourism sector with lived experience of disabled people to design and deliver a programme that engages and inspires through real and

authentic experiences, practical, cost-effective ideas, and open, honest discussions.

Our training will be not only codesigned but delivered by a team of disabled people. Having disabled people deliver the training is a fundamental part of working towards a positive change in attitude by non-disabled participants. The lived experience team will also benefit from training and support to develop their skills and product (such as the tourist itineraries). This will have a legacy for phase 3 and beyond, helping to create accessible tourism influencers and ambassadors.

The programme focuses on soft barriers (such as the mindset of staff) which businesses have more power to change (rather than physical barriers such as on-street disabled parking) with a particular focus on different types of disability where particular need or interest was indicated during phase 1 and different subsectors where particular need or emerging champions were identified during phase 1 (such as travel and transport and night-time economy).

Engaging a minimum of 80 relevant businesses, the inclusive tourism programme will leave all participants – tourism business and disabled people with increased skills and confidence to continue to promote Belfast as an accessible and welcoming city.

The project plan in appendix 1 presents the programme for phase 2. This will be further developed through research and consultation in partnership with the Accessible Tourism advisory Group. This group established by Belfast City Council has representation from Tourism NI, Visit Belfast, Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance/Titanic Belfast.

Below is a summary of the programme:

1. Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Seminar with a line-up of inspirational speakers
2. Six on-line training videos for the tourism industry
3. One best practice video for the tourism industry to learn from peers
4. Three Living Library events for the tourism industry
5. Three new tourism video itineraries to inform visitors and inspire them to explore Belfast

For further information also included is the invitation to attend the first Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Seminar *Embrace the Inclusive Spirit*.

The Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Programme has received generous support from Tourism NI and our partner venue Titanic Belfast.

3.0 Financial & Resource Implications

The Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Programme is funded via Tourism and Events Development budget. Tourism NI are supporting the programme with Titanic Belfast venue partner and in-kind funding from Visit Belfast.

4.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications

The cultural strategy, A City Imagining is subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). A specific screening has been carried out on this associated tourism plan and was included as part of the consultation exercise.”

Following discussion, the City Solicitor agreed that she would link in with the Belfast 2024 Team with regard to accessibility at future events and bring a report back to the Working Group.

The Working Group noted the report.

Chairperson