

Disability Working Group

Thursday, 9th May, 2024

DISABILITY WORKING GROUP HELD IN PERSON AND REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor McMullan (Chairperson); and
Alderman Copeland and Councillors R. Brooks,
Doherty and Smyth.

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; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor G. McAteer.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th March, 2024 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Changing Places Toilet Policy - Consultation Update

The Policy, Research and Compliance Officer provided the Working Group with the feedback from the Changing Places Toilet Policy public consultation, which had been carried out between 29th January and 22nd April, 2024.

He outlined that a first draft had been completed and that 90 survey responses had been received, as well as two more detailed, written responses. The initial findings included that:

- 75.4% of the respondents agreed with the draft Changing Places Toilet (CPT) Policy, with a smaller percentage (17.9%) disagreeing;
- 66% of the respondents used the Parks at least once week;
- 39.7% of the respondents had a disability;
- 57.5% of the respondents were carers/dependents; and
- CPT facilities were required at large events and a commitment to a rolling programme of addressing the CPT deficit and toilet needs was identified.

The Members stated that they had received a letter from Ms. C. McClements, a parent of a disabled child, and a strong advocate for Changing Places Toilet facilities.

In response to a Member's question, the City Solicitor confirmed that no changes had been made to the draft policy yet as the officers required political direction from the Members, as some suggestions during the consultation would involve a significant financial spend. However, she reiterated to the Working Group that the Policy was intended to go above and beyond the legislative requirements.

During discussion, it was agreed that officers would respond to Ms. McClements' letter and invite her to address the Working Group at its next meeting.

A Member asked whether a Changing Places Toilet had been considered as part of the redevelopment of the former Lockhouse. The project, which represented a total investment of £2.9million, was a collaboration between the Urban Villages Initiative, the Department for Communities, the Department of Infrastructure, Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group, and was being delivered in partnership with the Council. The City Solicitor confirmed that a representative from Property and Projects would be in attendance at future meetings of the Working Group however, due to staff leave, unfortunately no officer had been available to attend that meeting. She agreed that information would be circulated to the Members of the Working Group in relation to that issue.

In response to a further Member's question regarding the Council buying its own mobile CPT for use at community events, the City Solicitor advised that officers would seek to meet with the organisers of the Belsonic music festival to discuss the options and would provide an update at a future meeting.

Noted.

Disability Advisory Panel - Mapping Out Exercise

The Language Officer reminded the Working Group that it had met with the Disability Advisory Panel (DAP) on 4th December, 2023. It was agreed that the Disability Advisory Panel would carry out a mapping-out exercise, rating issues that they had and outlining what they would like to see delivered by the Council. The mapping-out exercise had since been carried out and the DAP now wished to present its findings to the Working Group.

The Working Group was asked to advise the Language Officer, by Monday, 13th May, whether they would prefer to meet the DAP on 5th or 12th June, at 10.30am.

Agreed.

Councillor McMullan

The Chairperson thanked the officers and his fellow Members for their work as part of the Disability Working Group, as the meeting was his last before he officially resigned as a Councillor. He stated that he was keen to see the work of the Working Group continue and that, ultimately, he would like to see the Council develop a Disability Inclusion Strategy which would seek to remove all barriers for those living with a disability within Belfast. He emphasised that it was crucial that the Council continued to listen to those with lived experience of a disability.

The City Solicitor thanked the Chairperson for his comments and stated that she was determined to put Equality and Diversity at the heart of her work over the next twelve months.

Each Member of the Working Group thanked Councillor McMullan for his tireless work and passion for advocating for those with a disability and wished him well for his future.

Chairperson