

Disability Working Group

Wednesday, 11th December, 2024

DISABILITY WORKING GROUP HELD IN PERSON AND REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Brooks (Chairperson); and
Councillors Abernethy, Brennan, Doherty and Smyth.

In attendance: Mr. R. Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer;
Ms. S. McNeill, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer;
and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 14th October, 2024 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Draft Changing Places Toilet Policy

Mr. Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer, advised the Members that the final draft Changing Places Toilet Policy had been reviewed by the Changing Places Toilet (CPT) Working Group on 29th August 2024 and by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) on 29th September 2024. He reminded the Members that a public consultation had been undertaken between 29th January and 22nd April 2024. 90 people had responded to the consultation, with the following findings:

- 75.4% of the respondents agreed with the draft Changing Places Toilet Policy, with a smaller percentage (17.9%) disagreeing;
- 66% of the respondents used the Parks at least once week;
- 39.7% of the respondents have a disability; and
- 57.5% of the respondents were carers/dependents.

In addition, two written responses had been received. The written responses had advised that the wording of the draft policy was not acceptable, for example, it stated that 'the Council should be committed', and not to strive to do and that there should be a required inclusion of CPT facilities at large events. It also stated that there should also be a commitment to a rolling programme of addressing the CPT deficit and toilet needs

identified. The officer detailed that, as a direct result of the feedback, amendments had been made to the final draft Policy, advising that the final draft Policy now stated that ‘the Council will commit to’, instead of ‘the Council ‘will strive to’ provide as required a Changing Places facility in every large building.

The Members were also advised that the Council would make it a commitment for large events being organised by external organisers/promoters to provide CPT facilities. The Council would also make an effort to include Changing Places facilities or to make toilet provision more accessible when extending or extensively refurbishing an existing Council-owned building when it was reasonable to do so.

The Members noted that the Council had received several recent requests in relation to improving physical access within Council toilets, including requests from several campaigns in relation to Stoma Friendly toilets and also correspondence from the Crohn’s and Colitis UK campaign “Not Every Disability Is Visible”. These campaigns had each requested the introduction of disposable facilities with accompanying signage/posters promoting the various causes.

The officer detailed that it was proposed that, in response to such requests, officers would advise that one of the first steps in the implementation of the CPT policy would be an audit of all accessible toilet provision across the Council estate. The purpose of this review would be to help identify any gaps and to quantify the level of resources which would be required to upgrade toilets and increase accessibility where feasible to do so.

The Working Group noted the update provided.

Update on Disability Actions – Delivering an Accessible City for All

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with preliminary work that has been carried out to develop a strategic roadmap for delivering an accessible city for all by 2035.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

3.1 Councillor Ross McMullan raised a Notice of Motion at Strategic Policy and Resources in June 2020. The full Notice of Motion is set out in the appendix attached to the report.

Objective 5 in the Notice of Motion highlighted the need to develop a strategic roadmap for delivering an accessible city for all by 2035 that leaves no one behind that provides a common strategic vision of disability access and inclusion across all its strategies and plans and outlines how we will get there.

Members will note that some aspect of the Notice of Motion from Councillor McMullan has progressed in that Disability Working Group has been established and as part of that the Council's Disability Advisory Panel will be invited to attend the Working Group periodically to provide a forum for councillors, our Disability Advisory Panel, council officers as well as other relevant stakeholders and experts from time-to-time, to discuss and progress actions on Belfast City Council's commitment to becoming an accessible city for all by 2035.

Councillor Ruth Brooks, the City Solicitor and the Language Officer have all been appointed as disability champions to create a focal point for elected members and council staff to improve access and inclusion in the delivery of Council services and have a key role in strategic policy making to deliver a common vision of disability inclusion.

Parts 4 and 5 of the Notice of Motion committed the Council to undertake an independent consultation report on models of best practice of accessibility and inclusion and developing a strategic roadmap for delivering an accessible city for all by 2035 that leaves no one behind and that provides a common strategic vision of disability access and inclusion across all its strategies and plans.

4.0 Preliminary work carried out

- 4.1 Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006), outlines duties to promote positive attitudes toward disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in public level. Pursuant to those commitments, as well as commitments within the Language Strategy, the Council adopted a Disability Action Plan for the period 2022-2025 in April 2022. A copy of the current Action Plan can be found at the following link:

<https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/Documents/Disability-Action-Plan-2022-2025>

As the Plan is due to expire next year, officers have begun preliminary work on a new Action Plan which will go beyond compliance with our statutory obligations and will focus on how the Council can drive a common strategic vision of disability access and inclusion across all its strategies and plans.

In parallel to that work, officers intend to appoint an external consultant early in the New Year to carry out an Accessibility Audit across the Council which will, amongst other things, help to inform the new draft Action Plan.

Stakeholder engagement will also be key to delivering the ambition of having an accessible city for all by 2035.

As part of that preliminary engagement, the Council had an engagement stall facilitated by the Equality and Diversity Unit with the support of an external facilitator at the International Day for People with Disabilities event at City Hall on 3rd December 2024.

Engagement exercises were conducted to capture the current issues faced by people with disabilities. Information was captured in different formats e.g. audio recordings via a recording booth and writing on post stickers. Themes explored were:

- what is going well in Belfast?
- what could be better in Belfast?
- what does a vision of an accessible city look like?

The outcome of the engagement was a success with a lot of constructive feedback from individuals with a disability and disability stakeholders contributed to the engagement at the event.

Elected members will also be aware of the Council's ABLE network, which Membership of the ABLE network is open to all council staff who consider themselves to have a disability; as well as carers, allies or supporters of people with disabilities.

The network aims to work on the following themes:

- Awareness of disability /able to work
- Benefits of the network in raising the profile of disability, providing guidance and support to staff and managers
- Listen and share experiences
- Encourage people to disclose if they have a disability

The ABLE Network and Disability Advisory Panel will also be key stakeholders and representatives of both groups will be invited to attend a future meeting of the Working Group to inform the Action Plan at the earliest point.

An update report on the Accessibility Audit and the emerging Action Plan will be presented to the next meeting of the Group.

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

The actions set out in this paper can be met through existing budgets and resources.”

A Member referred to the success of the recent International Day for People with Disabilities event at the City Hall on 3rd December 2024 and commended all those involved in the event.

The Chairperson welcomed the update and work undertaken. She referred to correspondence that she had recently received advising that Ulster Rugby had a 'temporary sensory room' which they were keen to share with other Sports Clubs throughout the city and she encouraged the Members to promote this amongst their local communities and organisations.

Noted.

Chairperson