

Access and Disabilities Working Group - Thursday 23 June 2pm

Minutes

Present:

Cllr Jan Gavin - Chair
Cllr Karen Rowland - Vice Chair - Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation
- Abbey Ward Councillor
Cllr Brenda McGonigal - Park Ward Councillor
Cllr Nusrat Sultan - Thames Ward Councillor
Helen Bryant - Access Officer RBC
Clare Muir - Policy and Funding Manager RBC
Richard Hall - Licensing & Enforcement Officer RBC
Nina Crispin - Information & Engagement Officer Public Health and Wellbeing Team
Sam Shean - Streetcare Services Manager

Bob Bristow - Chair Reading Association for the Blind
Brian Oatway - Member of the Public
Trish Wright - MS Therapy Centre
Jenny Turner- Readibus
Mary Pierino - Readibus
Stuart Rider - Member of the Public

Apologies

Cllr Isobel Ballsdon - Caversham Heights Ward
Nigel and Barbara McAlister
Laxshmi Kachwaha - Readibus
Isabelle Redfern Rehabilitation Officer (Visual Impairment)

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr Gavin welcomed everyone, and asked people to introduce themselves.

2. MATTERS ARISING

Pavements blocked by bins and parked cars -

Cllr Rowland asked for reassurance that that action would be taken to highlight the problems and for stickers to be put on bins.

It was noted that branches and trees were also causing obstruction problems.

Play equipment had been installed in Prospect Park. Disabled children needed to be involved with any launch. The date was unknown at the time of the meeting. It was noted that the Council working with a subgroup ensuring that play areas were accessible had been a big success.

The subgroup would convene again when the need arose.

3. COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None

4. DISABILITY PRIDE

Cllr Rowland reported back that regretfully this had been put back until next year. July 2023 was now the target, as this was Disability Pride Month. Funding needed to be found and a brand established for the event.

A working group would be needed to organise the event; this would need to be chiefly run by disabled people, in the spirit of "nothing about us without us".

It was agreed that the event should be celebratory, and difference should be celebrated with the suggestion that ex-military, Paralympians and children's groups involved.

AGREED

That Reading Disability Pride be postponed until July 2023. Between this meeting of the Working Group and the next in September, Terms of Reference and timeline would be drafted for the subgroup and nominations be sought.

5. HIGHWAYS

Sam Sheen presented his report (sent previous to the meeting). He explained that funding was available for improvements to the highways, such as pavements. Many places did not have dropped kerbs and other items to assist disabled people.

The Highways Team needed the Access and Disabilities Working Group and Ward Councillors to report any areas in the town that had problems with access to highways and footways.

Many dropped kerbs had been installed; these were not at controlled crossings, they were in residential areas.

Sam said that he would contact the Working Group to create a programme of works.

Cllr Gavin asked how many dropped kerbs the new funding would provide. Sam replied that some areas were not suitable for dropped kerbs but a minimum of 5-7 dropped kerbs per ward would be a starting point.

All new dropped kerbs would be accessible, but it was too expensive to change the existing kerbs. If there were maintenance issues, the kerbs could be mended.

It was noted that:

- vans were parked in many places, and sometimes wheelchair and mobility scooter users had had to go in the road to avoid them. Some pavements were very narrow, especially near Orts Road.
- Parking on pavements was a problem that was increasing. Neither the roads nor the pavements could be widened. Double yellow lines could be a solution. Police had to witness people parking on footways. The possibility of getting a representative of Thames Valley Police to attend meetings was discussed. Councillor Gavin said that the Working Group did not have statutory status and could not call public bodies to account, but the police could be asked to attend a meeting if there were a suitable agenda item.

Suggestions of places where the highways or footways needed attention should be sent to Helen Bryant or ward Councillors.

Sam said that the recent tour of the town with ADWG members had been helpful, and he would do what he could with the resources available to him. He said that problems that had been resolved as a result of the recent tour of the

town, as well as other problems that had been reported, were included in his report. This included changed crossing timings where there was a problem.

Councillor Rowland thanked Sam Shean for the tour of the town, which had been very productive. A lot had been done. He said that he would be happy to have another tour.

It was noted that there had been several reports of stairs which had no handrails, or only had rails on one side. These needed to be reported, with locations, in order for the appropriate people to take action. Councillor Gavin had been working with Network Rail to try to solve the problem.

Funding had been released to address problems with traffic signals.

AGREED

That Sam Shean be thanked for his presentation.

6. TAXIS IN READING

Richard Hall attended and reported that the law had been changed, and drivers of taxis were now required to go to find the passenger and show them to the vehicle.

It was not lawful to refuse a wheelchair user or a guide or assistance dog owner, unless there was a genuine medical exemption.

Licensing would talk to any operators to establish why they had failed to fulfil their contract. An investigation would be held to see if there had been a breach of contract, and they would have to attend the Licensing Committee.

The driver and owner and company, if necessary, would be liable.

Evidence of a booking having been made, especially if using an app, would help the cause of the complainant.

Several attendees reported difficulties in getting taxis in the town including problems getting taxis at the station and at ranks, especially if they were using power chairs, ringing for a taxi but being refused and finding a reliable company.

It was also noted that ramps on taxis were not always in good repair, and this was a problem, especially for those with heavy power chairs. This compared to London taxis which were seldom, if ever, a problem.

Members of the group were reminded that they could contact the Licensing Team at Licensing@reading.gov.uk

If people did report problems, as much detail as possible was needed, including when incidents happened and where.

They were advised to ask to see the driver's badge or plate on the vehicle if in person and take details. The name of the driver and their number was to be displayed in or on the taxi.

AGREED

That a trial of taxis for a variety of wheelchair users would be held on 27 July.

7. AOB

Councillor Rowland asked that if people were interested in helping to organise the Disability Pride event, they should contact Helen Bryant, herself or Councillor Gavin.

It was raised that Blue Badge bays seemed to be decreasing in number in the town and parking regulations needed to be enforced more.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8 September 2022 - in the Civic Offices and on Teams.