

# Access and Disabilities Working Group - Thursday 8 September 2pm

## Minutes

### Present:

Cllr Jan Gavin - Chair

Cllr Karen Rowland - Vice Chair - Lead Councillor for - Environmental Services and Community Safety - Abbey Ward Councillor

Cllr Brenda McGonigal - Park Ward Councillor

Cllr Nusrat Sultan - Thames Ward Councillor

Cllr Anne Thompson - Tilehurst Ward Councillor

Helen Bryant - Access Officer RBC

Clare Muir - Policy and Funding Manager RBC

Mark Groves - Senior Licensing Enforcement Officer RBC

Richard Wilcox - Neighbourhood Services RBC

Graeme Rasdall-Lawes - Neighbourhood Services RBC

Adam Bevington - Digital and Website Manager RBC

Dan Peters - Reading Play Service Manager RBC

Trish Wright - MS Therapy Centre

Jenny Turner- Readibus

Mary Pierino - Readibus

Nigel McAlister - Member of the Public

Barbara McAlister - Member of the Public

James Aldridge - Reading Chronicle Local Democracy Reporter

### Apologies

Cllr Isobel Ballsdon - Caversham Heights Ward

Laxshmi Kachwaha - Readibus

Isabelle Redfern Rehabilitation Officer (Visual Impairment)

Fiona Price - Age UK Berkshire

Alain-Marcos - Member of the Public

Georgios Sergakis - Member of the Public

Bob Bristow - Chair Reading Association for the Blind

Brian Oatway - Member of the Public

Stuart Rider - Member of the Public

## 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

## 2. MATTERS ARISING

Apologies needed to be added.

Councillor Rowland's title needed to be amended, following her change of portfolio.

## 3. COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None

## 4. TAXI TRIAL FEEDBACK

Cllr Gavin thanked all involved with the trial and said that she hoped that it had been useful. Three vehicles had been tested in the trial, a standard Hackney Carriage (London Cab), a Mercedes People Carrier and an electric hybrid. The general feedback was that the Mercedes was good for some wheelchair users but the hybrid was considered the most accessible, however it was very expensive. Mark Groves also reported that a new Hackney Carriage may be on the market next year.

Mark said that a report had been sent to the Senior Management Team (SMT) to decide how to progress. The fleet could either be left as it was, or new and improved vehicles could be sought. Emissions criteria were also an important consideration. After the SMT had made its views known, Councillors' opinions would be sought.

Mark Groves asked that people report taxi problems to the Licensing Team as the team could only act if they knew what the problems were. A complaint could be made through the complaints section of the website, or by emailing the Licensing Team email box: [licensing@reading.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@reading.gov.uk) or taxi enforcement:

[taxienforcement@reading.gov.uk](mailto:taxienforcement@reading.gov.uk). Complainants would remain anonymous unless it was necessary to reveal their identities.

The question of driver training was raised. Mark said that training could be arranged for drivers. There was a new training service being provided by an external service. Wheelchair accessibility was being looked at and would be discussed.

Mark Groves and the Licensing Team were thanked for all their work.

Councillor Sultan asked what training or action could be put in place regarding drop-off at the station; taxi drivers were too eager to get passengers out of the cabs, and they would not go to areas which were out of the traffic. Bus drivers were impatient and beeped their horns. Mark

Groves said that this raised several points; especially drivers not doing what they should have been doing, and the drop off point might not have been in the right place. It was possible that Reading Buses needed to carry out some training for their drivers. He again urged people to report these problems, and especially take the badge and plate number of the taxi driver and cab (if possible).

## **5. BINS AND WASTE COLLECTION**

Councillor Gavin asked the members of the Group about problems that they had had with bins and waste collection. It was noted that there was a problem of bins obstructing pavements, on bin days making it difficult or impossible for people in wheelchairs and mobility scooters, forcing them into the road; or for people with visual impairment to walk on the pavement safely. Sometimes bins were thrown or left in the gutter. There had been problems in most weeks.

Graeme Rasdall-Lawes and Rick Wilcox attended from Neighbourhood Services; both agreed that there was a problem with bins on pavements and undertook to clarify the information given to residents about when they should put their bins back on their properties. They also informed that Bin crews were supposed to ensure that bins were put back properly but that 1500 properties' bins were collected per day, which left seconds for each bin to be dealt with. The crew were instructed to put the bins back where they collected them from. They noted that food bins were particularly difficult for visually impaired people to see, and crews should have put them back on people's properties.

Councillor Rowland said that there had been a good solution to the problems in Katesgrove with the hills and the narrow pavements where certain areas were designated to have larger, communal bins. In Zinzan Street, many blind people went down the street to the Reading Association for the Blind on Tuesdays and Fridays and the collection day for bins was changed to avoid those days. This was a tailored response to ensure better access.

Councillor Rowland asked for people to let their Councillors, Graeme and Rick know about problems with particular streets, to see if a solution could be found.

Councillor Sultan asked how visually impaired people found out what day bin day was, if they didn't have access to the Internet, and they couldn't use the printed bin calendars. Bank Holidays caused confusion. Graeme Rasdall-Lawes said he realised that this did exclude certain groups, and that this needed to be discussed.

Councillor McGonigal said that there was a WhatsApp group on her street, and messages were sent to let residents know which bin was supposed to go out when. It worked very well. Graeme Rasdall-Lawes said that residents could be encouraged to do this, or similar.

Councillor McGonigal made a plea to ask that the green waste bag service should never be taken away. It was a wonderful service. Graeme said that this would not happen. He realised that people with smaller gardens found the bag system useful.

Councillor Thompson said that a resident had said that currently they put their medical waste out in a bag, but they were concerned they presented a health and safety hazard. Some authorities had actual bins, like the food bins.

Graeme said that this would be considered - food waste bins could be used, with a differently coloured lid. The group welcomed this suggestion.

Councillor Gavin thanked the members of the Group for their contributions. She said that she looked forward to Graeme and Rick returning to the Working Group with their ideas and suggestions. There needed to be an information scheme to let residents know the problems that bins left in the pavements could cause. They needed to be informed and encouraged to be better citizens.

## 6. COUNCIL WEBSITE

Adam Bevington, Digital and Website Manager attended to tell the Group about what improvements had been made to the website recently following feedback. (A slide presentation would be shared separately)<sup>[MC1]</sup>.

Adam said that the aim for his team was for Reading Borough Council to be in the top 30 councils in the whole country for accessibility. The goal was to have 100% accessibility. Progress was monitored by a company called Silk Tide, who monitored all the Council's web accessibility, and published a public report every month to show how the Council was progressing, compared to other public bodies. He reported that the team had achieved an excellent status and the Council's website was doing very well in comparison with other public sector sites.

The site was now simpler to navigate, and more mobile-friendly. Search results were easier to get and the suggestions were better. The tool to find out when bins were to be emptied was now on the front page, both on PCs and phones.

Adam was preparing an action plan and would come back to present it to the Working Group in the future.

Nigel McAlister highlighted that the website was poor for giving information that was useful for disabled people, especially regarding parking, Blue Badge spaces, taxis and toilets. Parking was a particular problem, because the rules varied between Local Authorities.

Councillor Gavin agreed that this needed to be investigated. Adam said that he had just done some work on parking, and that he would work on it further, and then report back to the Group. There had been a discussion about information on the site specific to disabled people in one specific place. It was suggested that examples be sought, of council websites where disabled access information could be accessed quickly and easily, such as a separate page. Camden Council was suggested as a starting point.

Councillor Gavin said that it might be useful to have a separate meeting and identify a list of things that people would need to know if they went to a place for the first time. People should send their ideas to Helen Bryant, c.c. to Adam Bevington.

## **AGREED**

**That Adam Bevington would come back to the Group with an action plan and a specification.**

**That members of the Group should send ideas of information that they would need when visiting an area for the first time to Helen Bryant and Adam Bevington.**

## **7. PROSPECT PARK PLAY AREA**

Dan Peters gave a presentation regarding the new play area.

He said that wheelchair users had enjoyed playing crazy golf. There were 9 holes. Each of the holes was based on a Reading landmark. Customers could go through the course twice.

There was a Changing Places facility at the park now.

There was a chance to take part in adaptive archery, which would begin at the end of September.

There were tennis courts, sports courts, low ropes activity, a climbing tree tower and parkland activities. There was a café which was due to open soon.

The playground would open in September.

The archery would be open for groups, and equipment was available. Instructors were needed. It could be booked as a group activity.

Dan said that the meeting room at the park held 12-15 people, and the Group was more than welcome to book a meeting.

## 8. DISABILITY PRIDE DAY

The Disability Pride event had been postponed until 2023 in the summer. A short video of Brighton's Disability Pride Day was shown and then the Group workshopped ideas for what they wanted to see on the day, and what the event should look like.

It was agreed:

- that the emphasis needed to be on celebrating disabled people and our rights as human beings who all had something to contribute to society.
- The disabled community needed to be involved - nothing about us without us.
- that the event would start small to see if it worked well
- resource needed to be quantified and identified

Councillor Gavin asked the members to get into groups to discuss what was needed and to give words to describe the event.

Fun and Positive - Activities to take part in - needed to be inclusive and integrated. Colourful so that the event would be remembered. Music - musicians

Pride - Disability Pride needed to be separate from Pride because disabled people needed their own visibility. It needed to have its own identity. It was suggested that Disability Pride could be confused with the main Pride event, but it was argued that Disability Pride was quite well established within the disabled community, in other countries as well as the UK. There was a Disability Pride flag, and this could be displayed to differentiate the event from the other Pride.

Change - how disabled people were treated. Barriers needed to be broken down.

Visibility - people in general needed to see that things that they took for granted were not necessarily there for everybody.

Inclusivity was key, including catering to various diets. There should be children's activities, which should be inclusive and centred in the community, but there should be things to do for everybody. Drama - dance - easy movement - no restrictions. Quiet areas would be needed for people with conditions such as autism. The Avenue School and other schools in the area could be involved, and the University.

The main area would be the town centre, but other facilities in town could be asked to put on inclusive events.

**AGREED: A working group be established to start planning the event.**

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## **9. AOB**

1. Nigel McAlister requested a future agenda item on the new pool at Palmer Park. Helen Bryant reported that the pool was still under construction. There had been a presentation to the Access and Disabilities Working Group previously, before the pool was built. She said that she would send the presentation to Nigel.

Councillor Gavin suggested that the architects or officers from Leisure be invited to the next meeting.

2. A question was asked about the best practice regarding shared use of the station subway, and how disabled people could get involved with the consultation.

The details of the consultation would be included in the next meeting.

### **AGREED**

**That either the developers, architects or officers from Leisure be invited to the next meeting to discuss access within the Palmer Park swimming pool.**

**That the details of the consultation regarding the station subway be included in the next meeting.**

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**Thursday 24 November 2022 - in the Civic Offices and on Teams.**