

Access and Disabilities Working Group - Thursday 22 June 2pm

Minutes

Present:

Cllr Jan Gavin - Chair

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

Cllr Anne Thompson – Tilehurst Ward Councillor

Cllr Andrew Hornsby-Smith – Church Ward Councillor

Helen Bryant – Access Officer RBC

Clare Muir – Policy, Voluntary Sector and Funding Manager RBC

Brenda Ellis – Reading Crematorium - Bereavement Service Operation Manager
RBC

Lisa McNulty – Red Quadrant

Bob Bristow – Chair - RAB

Nigel McAlister – Member of the Public

Barbara McAlister – Member of the Public

Jenny Turner – Readibus

Trish Write – Readibus

Mary Pierino – Readibus

Georgios Sergakis – Member of the Public

Brian Oatway – Member of the Public

Jenny Keep – FAB 4 All

Apologies

Stu Pearce

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr Gavin welcomed everyone and asked people to introduce themselves.

2. MATTERS ARISING

Nigel McAlister Requested that minutes be sent out to attendees prior to the next meeting as had been the practice previously.

Councillor Gavin said that usual practice at the Council was that the Minutes were sent out with the agenda. But suggested that the Minutes could be done within 3 or 4 weeks; it should be noted that Helen Bryant was writing the minutes as a professional officer, and not as a Committee Administrator.

Agreed: To distribute minutes 28 days after the meeting from the September meeting.

He also raised that the minutes did not include his request under this to discuss Blue Badge fraud fully. He expressed the opinion that there had been very few prosecutions in Reading for this, and other places fared better, including Buckinghamshire. They had prosecuted hundreds of people. High Wycombe might be a good comparator for Reading.

People misused Blue Badge Bays. He said he had tried to find a suitable representative to attend a future meeting. Buckinghamshire County Council had been reorganised, and the Blue Badge Team had been moved to Enforcement. The most appropriate body might be the [BBFI – The National Agency for Blue Badge Fraud Investigations](#).

Agreed: That Blue Badge Fraud should be on the next agenda and that Helen would find a comparison between High Wycombe and Reading.

Councillor Gavin said that it was illegal for taxi drivers to charge more for wheelchair users and had written to the complainant.

Councillor Rowland would take back the comments regarding the pool at Palmer Park to GLL. She was unsure if the temperature had been raised yet.

3. COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor Rowland said that she was a trustee of RAB.

4. READING DISABILITY PRIDE DAY

Councillor Gavin gave an update about the day – it was to be an exciting day as it was the first time it had been done in Reading.

The date had been set for 8 July from 11-3.

There were to be activities, stalls and disabled people were to perform. There was to be theatre, singing and comedy among other things. Members of the Group were asked to spread the word about the event. The day had had a small budget, but the Leader of the Council had generously given some money.

It had been advertised on the Council's Facebook and Instagram pages, and in My Reading.

It was hoped that people would stop and enjoy some of the activities.

Mary Pienero asked if it was for everyone, and Councillor Gavin said that it was.

It was to be held on the round space outside Marks and Spencer's.

There were to be activities for adults and children. It was to be a celebration.

OBJ

5. DISABLED ACCESS AT READING CREMATORIUM

Brenda Ellis, Bereavement Service Operation Manager at Reading Crematorium, attended the meeting to discuss problems with wheelchair access there, in response to Nigel McAlister's comments at the previous meeting. She said that an audit had not been carried out recently. There was some signage for disabled parking, but this was being looked at.

The website had been updated so that people were aware of where the public lavatories were. The accessible WC was being changed – it was possible that it would not be done until the end of next year, but it was hoped that this would solve the access problem.

There were limits to where parking could be placed. There was a problem with the button on the front door.

Councillor Gavin asked why there had been a delay. Brenda Ellis said that there had been a problem with a cremator. The building was being improved. There had been problems finding contractors.

Nigel McAlister volunteered to help with an access audit.

Mary Pienero asked how people could find the information they needed if they didn't have access to the Internet.

Brenda Ellis said that signage was available and there were attendants who could give assistance.

Brian Oatway asked if the Working Group could see the design of the lavatory before it was agreed. People who needed to use the accessible WC tended to be women, because there were long queues for the ladies', there needed to be more facilities for women.

Brenda Ellis said that there was no space to put them. People did not tend to use the WCs much.

Councillor Gavin thanked Brenda Ellis for attending.

6. OVERGROWN HEDGES AND OTHER PROBLEMS

It was noted that this was a big problem. It was not possible to monitor every hedge, and many were on private land.

The Council had a duty of care regarding overhanging branches. If the land was private it was a problem, because the tenant or homeowner needed to be contacted.

Members of the Group were urged to use the Love Clean Reading app if possible.

Bob Bristow said that he constantly had problems with overgrown greenery.

Barbara McAlister said that there was graffiti on a Palmer Park sign, she had reported it and hoped to get a reply to get it cleaned off.

The Wokingham Road overhanging branches were in hand.

Councillor Rowland said that officers did go back and address problems regularly. It was hoped that residents would notice their own hedges, etc, if they were becoming a nuisance. The Council's grass cutting had fallen behind.

In Friar Street the rainbow Pride crossing had been repainted to reflect the new, more inclusive Progress flag. Councillor Rowland had anticipated that some people would have a problem with it. The stripes that been painted, not the triangular part.

Some people who are visually impaired had complained, and Cllr Rowland apologised, and understood their concerns.

Bob Bristow said that he had not come across many branches, but on Katesgrove Lane on the IDR side he had caught the edge of a branch.

Councillor Gavin explained how to report problems with the **Love Clean Reading app**. People needed to take a picture of the problem, the geolocation function on the app would be able to locate where the problem was. Notes could be made, and there were several categories to choose from. An acknowledgement would be received, and when the job had been carried out it would be noted.

There was also an online form. People could contact Customer Services, or their local Councillor. If there was a big problem, the Council would clear it and try to recharge the landlord or landowner.

Councillor Hornsby-Smith said that the app would automatically assign the complaint to the Reading area.

7. ELECTIONS

The Chair asked if there had been any concerns during the local elections and wondered if the new requirement to carry photo ID had caused any problems.

Most of the members of the Working Group had a postal vote. There had been people outside the polling stations to remind voters about the need for photo ID. There had been a small number of people who had not had suitable ID but returned, and some who did not return.

From October voters would need to have photo ID for postal votes; Councillor Gavin had read this on a government website.

It might be difficult for some people to get this ID. It might deter some people from voting. Fraud was a very minimal problem.

There had been prosecutions for voter fraud, but no action had been taken.

The Working Group could write to the Electoral Commission to explain the problems that members might have.

This may need to be done before the next meeting. Enquiries could be made to find out if local groups wanted to join the response.

Nigel McAlister proposed that there be a vote, as this move would make voting less accessible, especially for visually impaired people.

Jenny Keep said that it might be a useful idea to carry out a survey to see if people would still vote.

Brian Oatway suggested a joint action with older people.

He asked about the design of polling stations, and whether or not they were required to have toilets.

The Returning Officer would be asked.

AGREED

Cllr Rowland and Helen Bryant to action the letter.

8. AOB AND CONCERNS

Readibus wanted to ensure that it was on the Council's website. It was not, and there should be a link to it. However, it was possible to search and find a link on the site.

Agreed: Web Team be asked to add a link to Reaibus to the Disability Services page on the RBC website

Helen Bryant read a list of the accessible WCs which were useable by the public. Along with retailers such as Marks and Spencer, John Lewis and House of Fraser, and The Oracle and Broad Street Mall, they were;

- Reading Railway Station
- Reading Town Hall
- Malmaison Hotel
- Pentahotel
- Novotel
- The Roseate

The question was asked if hotels would welcome the public to use their toilets.

Brian Oatway suggested that there be an app, or there could be stickers in the window.

READA might be able to produce a map of where they were.

It was noted that The Great British Public Toilet Map: [Toilet Map: Home](#) showed accessible toilet sites.

Bob Bristow said that he had found it impossible to get a taxi to get him to an appointment at 9.30 am. That was the time when many taxi firms carried out the school run. If people explained that a later appointment was needed to make sure they got there on time, some members of the Group said that those making the appointments were willing to help. People needed to explain that they had no alternative but to use a taxi to get there.

It was reported that Caversham Good Neighbours would take people from the Caversham area.

A list of organisations that could help was needed.

A service was needed for people to get to hospital appointments and the like.

Nigel McAlister said that he had had to go to a private hospital and that there were no taxis easily available.

Bob Bristow said that as people got older they may not have their own transport, and so the problem would get worse.

Appointments needed to be made when taxis were available.

Councillor Rowland said that, regarding a deposit scheme for cans and bottles, the three councils, Reading, Bracknell Forest and Wokingham were trying to start a take-back service from various companies. She would continue to push this.

Lisa McNulty, from Red Quadrant, who are working on the new library and extension of The Hexagon, said that there was to be a survey and focus group, to work out how disabled people used the library and what they wanted from it.

If there was time, a representative could talk to the Working Group about the project, to raise any issues. They could explain how disabled people could be accommodated.

Focus groups would be held in the next month, and there was the possibility of online focus groups. A date needed to be found when the maximum amount of people could take part.

Councillor Gavin said that maybe the MPs could look into the problem of transporting people to hospital appointments.

Barbara McAlister said that she and Nigel had already raised it with Readibus and they were still unable to get help.

Councillor Gavin reminded the members of the Group that Readibus was a charity, and therefore might be limited.

AGREED

Cllr Gavin would ask READA about the issue of hotels allowing the public to use their toilets, and the possibility of stickers for windows.

Helen Bryant to put together a list of local transport organisations suitable for disabled people.

Lisa McNulty would send details to Helen Bryant to distribute to the members of the Working Group.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

THURSDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2023 – in the Civic Offices and on Teams.

The meeting ended at 15.45