

Access and Disabilities Working Group - Thursday 7 September 2023

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

Alex Wylde – Policy and Performance Officer RBC

Clare Muir – Senior Policy Officer RBC

Matthew Golledge – Public Protection Manager

Bob Bristow – Chair - RAB

Jenny Turner – Readibus

Brian Oatway

Jenny Keep – FAB 4 All

Shirl Scola

Rona Topaz

Stuart Pearce

Georgios Sergakis

Apologies

Cllr Stephen Goss

Carol Froud

Cheryl Young

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr Gavin welcomed everyone and asked people to introduce themselves.

MATTERS ARISING

The Blue Badge Fraud item was to be deferred to a future meeting.

Voting and ID – no guidance or clarification had yet been received from the Government, and so it had not been possible to send a letter on the subject.

Councillor Gavin had contacted READA regarding how shops and businesses would show that they were willing for their toilets to be used by members of the public. There had been a lot of interest in a campaign, and research was being done about how other local authorities dealt with the matter.

There was a European Access City Award, but Cllr Gavin admitted that lots of work would need to be done for Reading to win.

Businesses in town were being asked if they would like to participate in a campaign to let people know that they were welcome to use their toilets.

Helen Bryant said that she would look into community transport further, as she had not been able to find much information.

The toilet map did not include the Council Offices or the library.

[Toilet Map: Home](#)

Readibus had recently started to take people to hospital appointments, and the question was asked if people needed to book these trips in advance, and if people needed to be members.

Jenny Turner said that many journeys had been made, and she thought that at least some of these would have been to hospital appointments. She pointed out that Readibus had won an award and thanked the Council for allowing people to use their bus passes on trips.

Jenny said that she would find out the information and let the Group know the position.

COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None

READING DISABILITY PRIDE DAY

Cllr Gavin gave a presentation with slides about the event, which was held on 8 July.

She asked if people had enjoyed the day and whether the Council should have another day like it.

There had been stalls, run by charities including Mencap, Fab4All and GLL, who ran the Council's leisure centres. There had been lots of volunteers who helped on the day.

Despite the weather the day had gone ahead. It had been a small celebration, but the location was good, in that there were many people

passing by. They also needed to shelter from the rain, which also contributed to the audience.

People had come from both in and outside of Reading. There had been a lot of media interest.

Marie Kuffour of Destiny Events Professional had been a brilliant co-ordinator.

Cllr Brock, the Leader of the Council, had been very supportive, and had given a financial contribution to the day.

The process of organisation would need to start earlier for next year. The event would need to be held later in the month – July being Disability Pride Month – because the Events Team had been very busy. More input from local disabled people was needed, and they needed to be included from the start to the finish. There could have been more involvement from the Council to create a better stall. There were some access issues that needed to be resolved, and the layout of the activities and stalls should be interwoven in the future.

Planning needed to be started as soon as possible for the next event, and funding and support needed to be secured from the Council.

The presentation should be distributed to potential participants.

Jennifer Keep said that it had been a really good event, and agreed that planning needed to start earlier. She thought that the event should be annual.

Rona Topaz said that she would like to see the event as part of the community as a whole.

A contingency plan was needed for extreme weather, and possibly the event should have both indoor and outdoor elements.

Cllr Thompson said that it had been a very good event and congratulated the organisers. She said that there might be scope to use the extension to The Hexagon and/or the new library in the future.

There had been a lot of people on the street, despite the weather.

St Laurence's church was suggested as a possible venue, so that the church could be used if the weather was disruptive.

Cllr Rowland said that there was lots of information for disabled people in Reading and she was hoping to engage with members of the public, especially those who may not have been aware of what was available in the community.

The question was raised of how the day could grow into a bigger event; Brighton had been used as a model. A decision needed to be made as to whether the event should get to that size.

It was pointed out that parades meant walking, and that that was difficult for many disabled people, it was tiring. It may put some people off taking part.

The possibility of the event being more than one day, and in more than one venue was raised.

More disabled people's organisations needed to be involved.

Cllr Gavin said that there should be a meeting in the early autumn, to discuss how the event might be funded.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Brock, had said that she wanted to put Disability Pride Day into the Council's calendar.

Sponsorship would be needed for the Day to grow into a bigger event.

Helen Bryant said that she had heard some feedback from people about what Disability Pride Day had meant to some disabled people and had found it very moving. She looked forward to the next one.

HACKNEY CARRIAGES AND PRIVATE HIRE STRATEGY

Matthew Golledge, Public Protection Manager at Reading Borough Council, attended the meeting to discuss the strategy.

[Consultation – Reading Borough Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028 - Reading Borough Council - Citizen Space](#)

The consultation was to end on 18 September.

Matt Golledge said that the Equalities Act placed a duty on taxi drivers to ensure that disabled people received a good service without being charged more than non-disabled people would have been.

There had been a taxi trial in the town, which some members of the Access and Disabilities Working Group had been part of, as well as other disabled people living around the Reading area. The trial had showed that some ramps to enable wheelchair users to enter and exit taxis had been too steep.

There were now newer models of taxis, which had lower emissions, which had been shown to be the best for wheelchair users to use.

The Council would be looking into which types of taxis could be used in the town.

The strategy did not have much detail; however, people could respond and answer questions about taxi ranks, taxis and other issues. Matt said that the Mercedes Vito taxi was not available in an electric version. It was difficult to assemble a fleet of a high standard unless manufacturers produced vehicles that were the most suitable for customers and drivers. There needed to be a review.

Cllr Gavin asked Helen Bryant to send a reminder of the deadline for the consultation, and the link to the consultation page.

Complaints had been received that disabled people had been charged more to travel in taxis, which was not legal. The question was asked, how this could be dealt with and challenged. Customers needed to be given the ways to do that.

Matt said that he would investigate how many complaints had been made. It was possible that something could be put on the Council's website to make the position clear.

Cllr Gavin said that the Council needed to let people know what to do in the event of a problem and how to identify culprits.

Cllr Gavin thanked Matt for his presentation.

AOB AND CONCERNS

Shirl Scola said that St Peter's Church in Caversham had problems with wheelchair access and disabled parking.

She explained that there were potholes in the path to the church, and that these met the criteria for a trip hazard.

There were others which might also be a problem for disabled people that might not meet the criteria, and so could not be filled at the moment.

Cllrs Ballsdon and Juthani had been to look at the church and path. Cllr Juthani had asked if the parking spaces outside the church could be moved.

Cllr Rowland said that she would be happy to discuss what could be done.

Jenny Turner said that she had gone to the station, and there were no warning lines on the step nosings on the steps just before the subway tunnel to show where they were for people who were visually impaired.

Cllr Rowland was delegated to deal with the problem.

Cllr Rowland said that there would be news about work on the station subway which would be starting soon. The Group may need to seek guidance on what to do about access when the subway tunnel was out of use.

Bob Bristow said that there should be tactile markings on the steps.

He had wanted to book Readibus but it was not running every other Saturday. Jenny Turner said that she would raise that at Readibus.

Cllr Gavin reported that she was a member of the Caversham Court Gardens Management Committee, and that the ramp had been closed for a long time. Level access for wheelchair users and others would be very costly, as would hiring a temporary ramp. The accessible toilet was on the lower level, but a portaloo had been installed on the upper level.

The question was asked, did people need a RADAR key to get into the portaloo. Cllr Gavin said that she would check.

Helen Bryant said that she had recently been to a big event, and there had been a very innovative accessible toilet, which had been on the back of a lorry. There was a platform lift to get to the facility, with bi-folding, lockable doors, and inside there was a full-size changing bench, a toilet and a sink.

[RevoLOOtion | A Mobile Accessible Toilet](#)

This might be a useful facility for events in Reading.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

THURSDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2023 – in the Civic Offices and on Teams.

The meeting ended at 15.25