

# Access and Disabilities Working Group - Thursday 21 November 2024

## **Present**

Cllr Andrew Hornsby-Smith – Chair - Church Ward Councillor  
Cllr Mamuna Naz – Vice Chair – Norcot Ward Councillor  
Cllr Karen Rowland – Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety – Abbey Ward Councillor  
Cllr Anne Thompson – Tilehurst Ward Councillor

Alex Wylde – Policy and Performance Manager RBC  
Helen Bryant – Access Officer RBC  
Eloise Grimes - Transformation Project Manager Transformation Programme Team Adult Social Care RBC  
Louise Anderson - Customer Relations Officer – Customer Relations Team RBC

Steph Smith - Area Community Sport Manager Reading, GLL  
Craig Hunter - CH Rugby Ltd.  
Chris Cutts – Chris Cutts, Sight Loss Support Officer Berkshire Vision  
Sarah Hutchins – Sight Loss Support Officer Berkshire Vision  
Helen Roche - Social Prescriber University Medical Group  
Jenny Turner – Readibus/Arthritis Matters  
Trish Wright – Readibus/MS Therapy Centre  
Bob Bristow  
Pat Watson

## **Apologies**

Samm Business Support Team Leader Adult Care RBC  
Christiane Silva – Support Worker RBC  
Tracey Proudlock - Company Director Proudlock Associates  
Matt Taylor – CEO Age UK  
Brian Oatway

## **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Cllr Hornsby-Smith welcomed everyone and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

## **MATTERS ARISING**

None

## **COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

None

## **PRESENTATION BY BERKSHIRE VISION**

Chris Cutts and Sarah Hutchinson gave a presentation about Berkshire Vision and the work it does as an independent charity which supports visually impaired and blind people. It has merged with Reading Association for the Blind (RAWB).

A range of services is offered, Sight Loss Support Officers go to people's homes and talk to them about their experiences. Basic equipment can be supplied. There are activities and sports days, with archery and other pursuits. There has even been an axe-throwing event. A telephone befriending service is available, and children and families can be taught life-skills. There is afternoon lunch club, and tea and cakes are available.

A living with sight loss course is offered, as are tech buddies who can help with problems with PCs, laptops, software and other technology issues. Some of the buddies are themselves visually impaired or blind. People can try iPads, digital magnifiers and other types of equipment before they buy them.

Service users can dial in from home to join in with some activities. They can talk to local companies to show that visually impaired and blind people can work.

Berkshire Vision is very grateful to its volunteers, and an event is held to thank them annually.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith thanked Chris Cutts for her presentation.

Cllr Rowland congratulated Berkshire Vision on a smooth transition from RAWB.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith asked if there was any connection with Readibus. Sarah Hutchinson explained that Berkshire Vision tells its members about Readibus and other community organizations, such as Caversham Good Neighbours.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith also asked if there is anything that the Council could do to assist. A ROVI (Rehabilitation Officer for Visual Impairment) from the Council would be helpful.

Helen Bryant asked if there are any dancers in the group, as she has been watching Chris McCausland with interest in "Strictly Come Dancing". There is a thriving dance class run by Berkshire Vision and one of the members has given an interview to a local radio station about watching Mr McCausland on the programme.

## **PRESENTATION BY GLL**

Steph Smith gave a presentation about the facilities available in the leisure centres.

Rivermead has accessible changing rooms, induction loops (for hearing aids), and a Changing Places facility for those who find the usual accessible WCs too small. Assistance dogs are welcomed in the centre and gyms. There are pool pods to allow wheelchair users a safe and dignified way to get into the swimming pool. Swimmers can easily access the pool in this way. There are waterproof wheelchairs which are used with the pods. There is tactile paving in the car park. There is equipment that can be used by all in the gyms.

Inclusive swimming sessions are available, and to older people too:  
Mondays from 11:30 - 12:30 Palmer Park  
Thursdays from 9:30 – 12:00 Rivermead

There are SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) lessons for young people. These have smaller class sizes.

There are also Level Water 1:1 swimming sessions for Children from 4 to 11 years old with a physical disability, visual impairment or hearing impairment.

Dry activities are also held in the centres.

SEND soft play sessions are held at Palmer Park:  
Tuesdays 9am  
Thursdays from 4pm to 6pm

SEND Sessions at the gym at Palmer Park are to be confirmed.

Inclusive cycling takes place on Wednesdays from 10-11.

Pickleball can also be played at Rivermead.

Pay As You Go is available, as well as several membership options:

[Concessionary](#)

[Senior](#)

[Student](#)

[Corporate](#)

[Better Health Community Network](#)

[UK Carers and Fab Carers](#)

[Disability](#)

<https://www.better.org.uk/monthly-membership/better-hf-inclusive>

<https://www.better.org.uk/monthly-membership/better-hf-conc>

Sports Together Berkshire are holding an event on Thursday 20th February 2025 – the Festival of Inclusivity – at The Avenue School, 9am-1pm.

Steph Smith asked if there was any feedback, and if there were any sports or activities that people would like to try.

The question was asked if the pay as you go option for GLL facilities was just for residents, or if it could be used by people from outside the area. Steph said that the membership was the same wherever people live.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith noted that one of the group requests from earlier meetings was to arrange a visit to the leisure Centres. He proposed that a working group be set up to arrange for this to take place and to ensure that Readibus is booked, in late January. This was agreed.

## **PRESENTATION BY SPORTS TOGETHER BERKSHIRE**

Craig Hunter introduced himself as one of the co-founders of Sports Together Berkshire (STB), which was established in 2013.

Accessible football, cricket, rugby, hockey, boccia and wheelchair basketball are all available. STB holds events during the year, and it would be useful to have a network of people who were able to promote them. The annual Parallel Windsor event is to be held on Sunday 5 July.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith asked how people could register or find out what sport and activity was available. Craig said that they start with the people and groups that are already known to STB, such as the Avenue School. STB was trying to link with Royal Berkshire Hospital, and to grow the network.

He said that the members of the Working Group need to think of extra activities.

Steph Smith said that she is open to hosting a Disability Pride/Sports event, with sports and performances, stalls and the like. It is a good opportunity to mix the two events. Cllr Hornsby-Smith explained that Disability Pride Month was in July. Members of the Working Group should speak to Helen Bryant if they are interested in joining the small group to organize an event and the visit to the leisure centres in January. Cllr Rowland said that she is interested in being part of the working group for the event.

<https://sport2getherberks.org/>

<https://www.parallellifestyle.com/windsor2025>

Cllr Hornsby-Smith thanked Steph and Craig for their presentations.

### **ACTION:**

**Members of the Working Group to let Helen Bryant know if they want to be members of the working group for the event.**

**Helen Bryant to enquire about booking Readibus for the trips to the sports centres.**

## **RBC ADULT SOCIAL CARE WEBSITE**

Eloise Grimes, Transformation Project Manager in Adult Social Care, has been carrying out some testing on the website, and Helen Bryant has sent details to some of the members of the Working Group to try to perform various tests to see how accessible it is.

Bob Bristow said that most of the pages are quite “clean” but the website would need to be set up so that he could use it with his screenreader. Some backgrounds are better than others in terms of colour contrast and Cllr Hornsby-Smith asked if they were suitable for use by those who are colour blind. The points were noted.

The question was also asked whether there is a print page option. Cllr Hornsby-Smith asked if there will be any BSL on the sites. Eloise said that there will be alternatives, but she will check.

Some of the members of the ADWG have already done some testing. Some of the people doing the testing have sensory needs.

Bob Bristow said that he is keen to look at more pages of the website.

## **HIGHWAYS**

Sam Shean gave an update on the Council’s road and pavement resurfacing programme, which this year is the biggest ever. Pothole numbers are quite high, but numbers of reports are low. The road resurfacing contract is worth £4m. More is programmed for next year, including Friar Street. There are around a thousand bus trips made on that road every day. Dropped kerbs are being put in where possible. Roads can be preserved without them having to be resurfaced, which is much cheaper. Some of the resurfacing can be done by in-house staff.

The Council is very committed to tree-planting, the spend is £100,000 per annum. 600 trees have been newly planted.

Reading is a town with several hills, which means that there are many steps, many without handrails. These are put in when possible. Road crossings are being funded. Pocket gardens in developments help to remedy flooding; surface water easily drains away.

There is an ongoing commitment to improve access for all, following the recent tour of the town by members of the Working Group. Benches in the town centre are being replaced. A-Boards are being removed, and enforcement is ongoing.

As a result of the group’s tour, the West Street/Friar Street junction pedestrian crossing has been altered as a response to feedback that for wheelchair users there was inadequate time to cross safely, and several dropped kerbs were identified as needing to be lowered further.

Work is going on at Kennet Side, which is substantial, including replacement of railings. A new bridge has just been installed. The subway at the railway

station has been successfully refurbished. Crossing points have been paid for by S106 funding.

Sam said that he hopes that the tours of the town can continue because they are very useful. There have been improvements made around the Metro Bank area. Paving improvements will continue. South Street has been added to the list of works.

Bob Bristow reported that the tactile cones on some of the traffic lights in the town, of which there are two or three, have been out of action for quite some time. Sam said that over £5k has been given to the Council from the Department for Transport. The traffic lights in greatest need of repair will be prioritized. The Council now uses a better contractor, which is also cheaper. Detection of faulty equipment will improve.

Jenny Turner said that when Readibus goes to park in Friar Street they must use the bollards, meaning that the drivers must get out of the bus in all weathers. She asked whether there is any other way to give security and access at the same time? Sam said that this is a difficult problem to solve, but a camera system is a possibility.

Louise Anderson asked if Sam had had a chance to look at the kerb in South Street which she had reported earlier in the year. Sam said that it is on the list of works and will be added to the programme.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith thanked Sam for his presentation.

## **AOB AND CONCERNS**

Cllr Hornsby-Smith said that a representative from Reading Deaf Club has been invited to speak at the March meeting.

Chris Cutts said that many groups have problems with digital exclusion. People need support, but there isn't enough.

Cllr Naz said that the Group needs to have more people from different ethnic backgrounds.

## **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**THURSDAY 6 March 2025 – in the Civic Offices and on Teams**