

Access and Disabilities Working Group – Thursday 5 March 2026

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
Cllr Will Cross – Redlands Ward Councillor

Alex Wylde - Policy and Performance Manager RBC
Jill Marston – Policy Officer RBC
Helen Bryant – Access Officer RBC
Grace Atherton - Strategic Transport Project Manager RBC
James Turner – Transport Planner RBC

Jamie Read – Community and Inclusion Manager – Berkshire Music
Trust
Rania Sammour – Community Connector – Berkshire – National Deaf
Children's Society

Bob Bristow – Reading Talking News
Brian Oatway – Member of the public
Fin Blackburn Finlay - Member of the public
Karen and Brian Jackson – Chloe's and Sophie's Special Ears Fund
Hayley Helsdown – Age UK Berkshire
Teresa Collias – Tenant
Pat Watson – Member of the public
David Wetherley – BSL Plus

Apologies

Sam Shean - Highways & Traffic Services Manager
Samm Mills-Hutchinson - Business Support Team Leader - Adult Social
Care - RBC

Cheryl Young
Dee Beech – Guide Dogs

Readibus

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a true record.

MATTERS ARISING

The issue of who owns the land outside the station was raised, following the Tour of the Town, which identified several issues that need to be addressed.

The issue of the lift in One Station Hill not functioning was also raised.

COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

BERKSHIRE MUSIC TRUST

Jamie Read gave a presentation about the work that BMT does to make music as accessible as possible for everyone.

The trust has a large musical instrument library with a variety of instruments that people can play, including inclusive ones, such as “pebbles” that light up and play notes, which Jamie demonstrated to the Group, and some that you play with eye movements. There is no waiting list to use the service.

The Trust works with people with dementia, Parkinson’s and people who are refugees. The Trust has an inclusion department.

Jamie said that people can go to the website and contact him, and someone will signpost them to the appropriate place, or to find an appropriate instrument.

The Trust works with a wide age range of people, from 2 years old to 92.

Councillor Thompson said that the bandstand in The Forbury might be a good place to perform.

Councillor Hornsby-Smith thanked Jamie Read for his presentation.

NATIONAL DEAF CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

Rania Sammour gave a presentation about the work that the National Deaf Children's Society does to support children and families.

Rania said that her son was born Deaf.

Rania said that there is the Berkshire Sensory Consortium Service. It is a good service that supports deaf children, however there is limited choice of BSL services available.

Teachers in places such as mothers' groups must have Level 3 BSL, and schools need to be more Deaf-aware.

Teresa Collias said there is a problem with resources for teachers and there were few teachers of the Deaf.

Councillor Hornsby-Smith asked what age range is being catered for by the NSDC. Rania replied that it is 0-25 years.

There are Community Connectors, of which Rania is one. They check on families, who can come to the Society when they need help.

There is a newsletter which keeps families in touch.

Councillor Hornsby-Smith suggested that Family Hubs could be used, there could be a regular time for early intervention and help.

Karen Jackson said that there was a Wellbeing Hub for Deaf children in Rushmoor, and that she would like to support one in Reading.

The question was raised as to how to include Deaf children at Bikeability in Reading, and about wearing helmets with cochlear implants.

<https://www.bikeability.org.uk/>

Councillor Rowland said that Reading Deaf Centre is offering BSL Level 2.

<https://readingdeafcentre.org.uk/bsl-class-level-2-at-rdc>

The Birkdale Trust gives grants to provide financial support to children and young people who have a hearing impairment, and to organisations that provide help to them.

<https://grantsforthe deaf.co.uk/>

Grants for those supporting deaf children and their families are also available from NSDC.

<https://www.ndcs.org.uk/community-grants>

Parents must be able to communicate with their Deaf children. They need to learn BSL.

There are apps which can be used on mobile devices.

Karen Jackson talked about BSL Boards for playgrounds. The boards are roughly £50 per board. Funding is stopping the charity from making it possible to get them in playgrounds, and Karen hoped that Reading Borough Council might be able to support the funding.

ACTION: Karen Jackson will liaise with Helen Bryant regarding Speaksee, which converts speech to text, to enable live subtitles for meetings.

Karen Jackson to contact officers at the Council to discuss the possibility of installing BSL boards in playgrounds.

<https://speak-see.com/>

Councillor Hornsby-Smith thanked Rania for her presentation.

The presentation is attached.

AUDIO MESSAGE BUTTONS IN BUS STOPS

James Turner and Grace Atherton updated the Working Group about the audio message buttons in the bus stops.

99 bus stops now have these installed.

If you press the button, you can hear about the next three buses that are expected at the stop, and when they are due.

The buttons are not fixed, so they could be moved if necessary. The volume and speed of speech are both adjustable.

Fin Blackburn Finlay said that the buttons are good and save you having to try to get past lots of people to read the screen.

Some of the announcements in some stops are too quiet, where there is a lot of traffic noise, such as Cemetery Junction. The question was raised if the sound could be louder during the day, and quieter at night. Another question was whether blind people and others who may need the buttons are aware that they are in stops. There needs to be more communication about it.

Brian Oatway said that he had not seen the buttons yet. People might not understand what they are for; possibly there needs to be some information in the bus stops.

If other groups would like to know about the buttons, James and Grace can come and talk to them.

Councillor Rowland asked Bob Bristow if Berkshire Vision were aware of the buttons. He has informed them.

ACTION: Helen Bryant to send the press release about the buttons to the Working Group.

TOUR OF THE TOWN

Cllr Hornsby-Smith reported back that following last year's tour of the town, there are now new benches in the town centre.

The main points made during the tour were:

West Street has a crossing that is confusing because of the angle at which it's placed.

There needs to be a directional guide for the station.

There are still no tactile markings at Garrard Street crossing where the taxis emerge from – they can be very quiet at low speeds.

On the station forecourt the new food vans can be difficult to manoeuvre around.

On Station Hill there is no tactile wayfinding. It is not easy to resolve this, as there is no one desire line. One set of tactile paving would not be a solution. There will be a tactile warning near the water feature.

The seating on the concourse blends with the paving.

Working with a Deaf/blind person in town can be very difficult; there are many uneven surfaces, which can make balance harder. At the Town Hall there is a metal pole. There was a bike leaning against it, which fell onto the Deaf/blind man's leg.

Councillor Hornsby-Smith said that there have been improvements to some of the paving around trees and their roots.

Fin Blackburn Finlay said that the general standard of paving and dropped kerbs seemed to have decreased; it is very difficult to move around using a power chair, and sometimes the only way to travel is on the road, which is dangerous.

Cllr Rowland said that she will talk to Licensing about the food vans. They are well-used, but access is also important.

Sam Shean in Highways keeps a spreadsheet of issues that need to be addressed, and those which have been resolved. Clutter such as the metal pole outside the Town Hall can be removed.

The Council is trying to ensure that pavements are more even. Members of the Working Group are urged to report any issues, and they will be dealt with as soon as possible.

ACTION: Cllr Rowland to talk to Licensing about the food vans

FESTIVAL OF INCLUSIVITY

We had a wonderful day last year, and another is to be held in the summer, on Thursday 23 July, at Palmer Park in the morning.

Posters and flyers will be out soon.

We hope that the Mayor will be there, as last time.

ACTION: Cllr Hornsby-Smith to check if the festival is suitable for people with dementia.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Bob Bristow said that he was still having problems with the website. He has been trying to get parking permits, but this has taken a very long time, and he was still unsuccessful.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

18 June 2026