

Access and Disabilities Working Group – Thursday 20 November 2025

Present

Cllr Andrew Hornsby-Smith – Chair - Church Ward Councillor
Cllr Mamuna Naz – Vice Chair – Norcot Ward Councillor
Cllr Will Cross – Redlands Ward Councillor

Alex Wylde - Policy and Performance Manager RBC
Helen Bryant – Access Officer RBC
Lisa Munga - Strategic Customer Experience Lead RBC

Ruth Pearce – Parenting Special Children
Ramona Bridgeman – Me2 Club

Bob Bristow – Reading Talking News
Brian Oatway – Member of the Public
Tony Freeman – Readibus
Cheryl Young – Guide Dogs
Dee Beach - Guide Dogs
Lyndsey Cunningham-Drury – Reading Deaf Club
Sam Dean – BSL Interpreter
Sarah Hutchins – Sight Loss Support Officer - Berkshire Vision
Roy Rangarirai – Resident and Former Young Carer
Stu Pearce – Guide Dogs

Apologies

Cllr Anne Thompson – Tilehurst Ward Councillor
Cllr Karen Rowland – Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and
Community Safety – Abbey Ward Councillor

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None

MINUTES

Approved as a true record with one change; the date of the next meeting will be Thursday 5th March 2026.

MATTERS ARISING

Cllr Hornsby-Smith said that he and Helen Bryant had visited Station Hill.

In the water feature area, there is a grate. The developer will make sure that there is proper tactile warning paving so that people who are blind or visually impaired don't wander into the area.

Stu Pearce said that getting to the station from the other end of Station Road was the hardest part – there is no way of finding a way across the open concourse and there is nothing to guide you.

He said that he will shortly be using a cane, as his guide dog is about to retire. Bob Bristow said that he had the same problem; there is nowhere you can find your location in that area. The bollards can send you off course.

Friars Walk, by the Siren Brew and the Ebb and Flow apartments is another problem area; you need to find the middle of the pavement, because there is no way to navigate.

The station concourse is the place which causes the most problems with wayfinding. People need to be able to find where to buy tickets. When you are in the station you can get assistance, but you need to be able to get there to begin with.

A lack of tactile paving and low seating being placed in access routes can be dangerous. People need landmarks, because it's easy to get disorientated, especially if you use a cane rather than a guide dog.

Cllr Cross said that the main problem area was on the concourse between the advertising sign and the steps.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith said that he will organise a meeting with the landowner to discuss what could be done. The Council needs to establish who owns the land.

Ramona Bridgeman said that it is very difficult to push an adult wheelchair user up the ramp at the station. The turns on the ramp are difficult to negotiate.

Roy Rangarirai said that the lift in the residential area of Station Hill isn't in use yet.

Dee Beach said that if there is tactile paving in the town it needs to be joined up. Cllr Hornsby-Smith said it would be looked at as a whole.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith said that an action plan could be drawn up, with members of the Group making suggestions.

ACTIONS

Cllr Hornsby-Smith to organise a meeting with the landowner to discuss what can be done to assist blind and visually impaired people.

Action plan to be drawn up, with suggestions from the Working Group.

The Council to establish who owns the land.

PARENTING SPECIAL CHILDREN

Ruth Pearse, the CEO and Founder of PSC gave a presentation.

The charity was set up 20 years ago. Ruth has a close family member who is neurodivergent.

The charity started in Reading but now operates from Theale.

People up to 21 years old are catered for, and the young people are mostly autistic, or have a learning disability or ADHD.

Before the charity was set up, there was a lot of unmet need and there was no support available for parents. It helps with the transition to adulthood and parents know where they can turn to for help.

The charity has several groups for the whole family, including a dance group for autistic girls and parents' groups. A helpline is available, and the charity has trained staff members who are themselves parents.

Workshops and courses are detailed on the website. There are coffee morning sessions. Training is available for professionals.

Charities all over the country are closing because of lack of funding. PSC does not have much funding. Parenting programmes are not funded in Reading.

Ruth Pearce asked about Commissioning opportunities.

Cllr Naz thanked PSC for all their work.

The Reading SEND Local Offer – Brighter Futures for Children - highly recommends Parenting Special Children.

Cheryl Young asked if PSC links in with other charities; there is a Facebook Group and a neurodiverse parents' group. Ruth Pearce has details.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith asked about the how the Council links in with PSC. Ruth Pearce said that officers don't often come to them. He asked if it would be useful to have officers to visit. He would ask if this would be possible.

Lyndsey Cunningham-Drury asked if PSC worked with Deaf children.

Ruth said that Zobia Kalim used to work with the National Deaf Children's Society, she would put them in touch with the Deaf Club.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith asked if PSC worked with children who had sensory needs and Ruth said that they do, but not so much with just physically disabled children; however, everyone is welcome. They do work with schools.

He thanked PSC for their presentation and for all the work that they do. He said they could make suggestions as to how the Council could assist them. It is useful to have the connection with Cllr Naz. The presentation is attached.

ACTION

Cllr Hornsby-Smith to request that Officers visit Parenting Special Children.

Me2 Club

Ramona Bridgeman said that the club had been running for 23 years.

The charity supports young people from 5-25 years.

Any young person who has additional needs or disabilities can be supported, and no diagnosis is needed.

The club aims to help with confidence, independence and making friends.

Volunteer buddies take children to mainstream activities; they meet the families at the venue. The buddies are carefully matched with the young people. Some will go on without support, and some will find mainstream groups challenging.

People can decide which activities they want to do. They can fundraise; they can make decisions as to how the club is run. People have taken part in the Green Park Challenge, they go to ice cream parlours, go-karting, swimming and other pastimes.

The Club runs "Special United", which is a SEND Youth Forum. Young people can have their say on local services. Those who take part are given an Amazon voucher for their time.

Members have been involved with the national Youth Inspiration Awards and Young Health Champions. They have spoken to committees at the Council. One of the young people has been quoted in Parliament. Me 2 Club is very proud of the people involved.

Some of the people are members of PHAB Club and have taken part in accessible skiing and have flown light aircraft.

There are open days, and the members take over the social media for Me 2 Club.

There is a Youth Ambassador for the Club, and they are permitted to go to board meetings.

It is a difficult time for charities. The Club held an emergency appeal during the summer.

Any help with funding would be gratefully received, as people are working harder for the money than ever before.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith asked how many people benefit from the Club in the area.

In the Reading and Wokingham areas there are 75 young people in groups. There are over 100 young people altogether.

30-40 in Reading alone access the care service.

The Club had to give up its Reading office, but now works in Theale, from the Reading Hockey Club.

He asked about the running cost. It costs £220K to run the Club.

There are 7 members of staff and 80-90 volunteers.

Ruth said that if small charities like theirs were not around, the Council would be paying more money out – clubs and groups like this relieve the pressure on Councils. Inclusion is so important.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith thanked Ruth for the presentation.

The presentation is attached.

PROCUREMENT OF BSL SERVICE

Lisa Munga, Strategic Customer Experience Lead explained about the process of companies bidding to provide a service for live BSL via a tablet. It is necessary to go back to the market and check that the Council is not prioritising one over others.

The Big Word was awarded the contract, in June.

<https://en-gb.thebigword.com/>

Each team will be able to request the service themselves. The company has a large database of interpreters.

Take-up of the BSL service is not as it is expected to be. The use of a video service should increase that.

Cllr Cross asked when will people be able to use the service.

Lisa Munga explained that the service is not ready yet.

The team had already talked to SignLive; they were expected to submit a bid, but they did not.

The Big Word should give a good service. Lisa said that she would like to come back to the Working Group to talk about it.

She explained that the Council would be moving to a new reception this year.

Lyndsey reported that she'd had a problem with a client at the hospital; they were met with a laptop and an interpreter on a screen. Video Relay Service is not good enough for medical appointments. Deaf people will always prefer a live service, face-to-face.

Lisa explained that the service would not be used in all situations.

Bob Bristow asked about the reception. Lisa explained that the new reception which will open next year will have floorwalkers, who will be able to direct people where they need to be.

There will be touch-screens for people who can use them, so that they can log themselves in.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith pointed out that people do not want to wait for two weeks for an interpreter if there is an urgent problem. There needs to be a balance.

Lyndsey said that a client of hers had had a flood at their house late at night, and was looking for a BSL service to contact, but there was nothing available. Extensive damage was done to the property, which might not have happened if a BSL service had been at hand.

Lisa said that a new out of hours service was being procured, and that she would check what could be provided. Inclusion and access are things that need to be worked on.

Lyndsey pointed out that, at the moment, there is no immediate help if you are Deaf, and a text service would be very useful.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith said that the Procurement Team needs to get in touch with Reading Deaf Club and other services, and see what gaps there are in provision of services. It would be useful to be able to contact housing managers. Brian Oatway said that hard of hearing people might also benefit from such a service.

Tony Freeman said that he is a Blue Badge holder. It is not an easy process to get a Badge; people must start on the Government Website and only then go onto the Council's website. It can take up to 6 weeks to get one.

[Apply for or renew a Blue Badge - GOV.UK](#)

Cllr Hornsby-Smith said that he had had two complaints resolved very speedily by the team and wanted to thank them.

COUNCIL WEBPAGE AUDIT

Members of the Working Group have already given good feedback.

Helen Bryant has carried out an audit and written a report. Alex Wylde said it is still a work in progress, and we will follow it up as soon as possible.

TOUR OF THE TOWN

This will probably be in February. A date needs to be fixed with Sam Shean from the Highways Team. It would be useful to have a wide range of people to come round and establish what needs to be done in town. We need to visit the station and find out who owns what part of the station, including the concourse.

ACTION

Helen Bryant to fix a date with Sam Shean for the tour.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE TOPICS

The group raised a number of suggestions:

Reading Borough Council Website – Disability Pages

Police – Anti-social behaviour, Safety, Access

Tour of the Town – including Station Hill

Inconsistency of crossings – tactile cones, audible signals, etc.

Tactile Paving

Unseen Aware – update

Highways – maintenance

Railway Stations – access and how to get assistance

Tilehurst Station lifts

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The new audio buttons on the bus stops are very useful for blind and visually impaired people, and others. Bob Bristow and Helen Bryant went to try them out with Officers from the Council.

A local visually impaired person has told Bob that the traffic lights near what was the Prudential Building have either no audio signal or tactile cones.

Tony Freeman said that since he'd had his stroke, it is more difficult for him to find information. He would like to go to a gym. Cllr Hornsby-Smith said that he could go to Rivermead (or Palmer Park) and he could get 1:1 assistance,

There is gravel and potholes, in Victoria Road, RG4 7QY and it is very difficult to get anywhere. The land is partly owned by Education.

Ruth Pearce said that trying to get a bus pass was difficult because it wasn't easy to find information, and people must print forms.

Reading Deaf Centre is giving BSL lessons, and they have events and a hall and conference room for hire. Roy asked when the BSL lessons will be held; they started in September, from 7-9pm (Level 1).

www.readingdeafcentre.co.uk

Cllr Hornsby-Smith said that the Festival of Inclusivity, which had been held at Palmer Park in September, was a wonderful occasion, there were lots of young people there who really enjoyed themselves playing sport. He wanted to thank Sport Together Berkshire, GLL and the Council for organising it.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 5 March 2026