

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	9 July 2019
Title:	Access Audit
Report of:	Cllr Rebecca Whippy (Cabinet member for disabilities and community safety)
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of report:	To seek Cabinet’s agreement for an audit to be undertaken to determine current levels of accessibility of public buildings and services for disabled people
Decision type:	Non-key decision
Officer recommendation(s):	That Cabinet agree in principle to an access audit being undertaken, subject to a detailed scope being developed including resourcing requirements.
Reasons for recommendations:	An access audit would enable the council to determine the current levels of accessibility for disabled people of public buildings and services in the Borough. As well as raising the profile of access issues the audit could also act as a catalyst for driving improvements in accessibility. It would also help ensure that the council is fulfilling its duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty.
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The council recognises that some groups experience stereotyping and unfair discrimination in society, and some groups are, or become, isolated through a number of barriers such as physical and mental disability, culture and language, deprivation and a lack of knowledge. The Council is committed to challenging all forms of inequality and takes its obligations to promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations very seriously. This commitment is set out in the council’s Equality and Fairness Policy.
- 1.2 For disabled people the environment in which they live can create barriers which limit their lives, in terms of not being able to access facilities and services. The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on providers of goods, services and facilities to make reasonable adjustments in order to avoid a disabled person being placed

at a “substantial disadvantage” compared with non-disabled people when accessing services and facilities.

1.3 In addition, the Equality Act 2010 sets out in Public Sector Equality Duty ((PSED) also known as the general duty or the equality duty) which requires us, when we are carrying out our business, to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic (which includes disability) and people who do not share it; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic (which includes disability) and people who do not share it.

1.4 When considering the ways in which disabled people may experience discrimination, the council is mindful of the range of types of disability which can impact on people’s lives, and that the nature of the disability is not always visible. Physical disability, visual Impairment, being deaf or hard of hearing, having mental health conditions, a learning disability, an acquired brain injury or autism spectrum disorder are all forms of disability covered by the Equality Act.

1.5 The council agrees an equalities and fairness action plan each year, which sets out what it will do to further its commitments with the Equality and Fairness Policy and to meet its commitment under the Equality Act and the PSED. The most recent action plan was agreed by Cabinet in March 2019. At that meeting it was noted by the Cabinet that training had been arranged and delivered on Access Issues, including the process of undertaking access audits, to Neighbourhood First teams and ensure Neighbourhood Officers are able to respond confidently and effectively to customer enquiries relating to access issues.

2 Responding to Access Issues

2.1 An access audit is the examination of an existing building, its facilities and services, against predetermined criteria to assess its usability. The audit may address, for example; physical access, building facilities, lighting and colour contrast, acoustics, signage and wayfinding, means of escape/evacuation, policies and staff training.

2.2 The council recognises the importance of undertaking access audits as a part of ensuring our buildings, facilities and services are accessible to disabled people. As mentioned above, officers in the council Neighbourhood First Team have been trained to understand access issues and to be able to undertake simple access audits as part of their role. This training is updated and refreshed as new staff join the team.

2.3 In addition, the council supports a Disability Involvement Group (DIG) which comprises representatives of local disability organisations. This group was established to represent the views of disabled people in Eastbourne, to obtain equality for all disabled people, to share information in the spirit of education and learning, to advise on improved access to services in Eastbourne, to help shape future service delivery in Eastbourne and to improve the evidence base of the

experience and outcomes of disabled people and the ability to deliver a fair, inclusive sustainable environment in Eastbourne for all disabled people.

- 2.4 The DIG has always highlighted the importance of accessibility as part of their work. To this end, the group organised an Access Day last year which was funded through their annual grant of £500 from the council. The event, which took place at The Beacon aimed to encourage disabled people to try something new, raised awareness about the importance of disabled access and encouraged conversations between disabled people, businesses and venues.

3 Proposal for an Access Audit

- 3.1 To further the council's commitment to the PSED, it is proposed that a full access audit be undertaken to build on the work already progressed, as set out in section 2 above. The intention of the audit would be to raise the profile of access issues and act as a catalyst for driving improvements in accessibility in the Borough. The audit would focus on the full range of disabilities (as per para 1.4), not just those limited by issues of physical access.

- 3.2 Further work is needed to fully scope the audit and to determine the resource requirements, but at this stage, Cabinet's agreement is sought for a scoping exercise to be undertaken, including consultation with relevant partner bodies (in particular the DIG), in order to draw up a more detailed, costed proposal for Cabinet's consideration. As part of this, consideration will be given to the introduction of an accreditation scheme for organisations and businesses. It is proposed that the audit would be undertaken in autumn/winter 2019 in order to inform development of the equality and fairness action plan for the following year.

4 Financial appraisal

- 4.1 If the recommendations of this report are approved, the financial implications of undertaking an access audit will be determined as part of the scoping exercise and will be presented in a future report.

5 Legal implications

- 5.1 If the recommendations of this report are approved, the legal implications of undertaking an access audit will be determined as part of the scoping exercise and will be presented in a future report.

6 Risk management implications

- 6.1 If the recommendations of this report are approved, the risk implications will be determined as part of the scoping exercise and will be presented in a future report.

7 Equality analysis

- 7.1 If the recommendations of this report are approved, an equality and fairness analysis will be undertaken and be presented in a future report.

8 Background papers

- Equality and fairness policy - https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/_resources/assets/inline/full/0/264960.pdf