
SCRUTINY INQUIRY PANEL - ACCESSIBLE SOUTHAMPTON
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 OCTOBER 2021

Present: Councillors Guest, McEwing, Rayment, Streets and Vaughan

Apologies: Councillor Coombs

1. **APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)**

The apologies of Councillor Coombs were noted. Councillor McEwing was noted as the substitute for Councillor Coombs for the purposes of the meeting.

2. **ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR**

RESOLVED that Councillor Vaughan be elected as Chair for the purposes of the Inquiry and Councillor Rayment be elected as Vice Chair.

3. **INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE**

RESOLVED that the Inquiry Panel approved the Terms of Reference, and the final version of the outline inquiry project plan, as presented in the Report of the Director of Legal and Business Operations.

4. **ACCESSIBLE SOUTHAMPTON - INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND**

The panel considered the report of the Director of Legal and Business Operations requesting that the Panel consider the comments made by the invited guests and use the information provided as evidence in the review.

Summary of information provided:

Accessible Southampton - Guy Van Dichele, Executive Director of Wellbeing (Health & Adults), Southampton City Council

- A presentation was delivered by Guy Van Dichele, outlining the importance of the inquiry for the City Council and the City of Southampton.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
 - Accessibility is the key to inclusive cities. People are excluded further if cities are planned and designed poorly.
 - The same walk through Southampton may be very different for people – someone without mobility problems will hardly notice the obstacles – By contrast a resident with disabilities may take the same journey as above but have a tortuous experience, and in many cases, it will become impossible to overcome.
 - Not enabling people to leave their home causes social isolation – social isolation is a killer.
 - You make cities accessible by:
 - Working with people and understanding their needs
 - Designing the city following best practice guidelines
 - Understanding what is available already

- Recognising that not all accessibility is physical – it can be about information / digital
- Using informed Accessible Impact Assessments when making decisions (SCC has a duty to undertake Equality Impact Assessments when developing policies or changing policies – This includes impact on Disabled People).
- We are probably at different levels of understanding of our environment for people – this understanding is growing and needs to continue to evolve.
- Everyone in the Council has a responsibility for accessibility at some level, Work needs to be done to create a culture of accessibility and inclusivity.
- As a Council we need to create tools to help our workforce plan to enable improvements to accessibility.
- Good practice exists in Southampton but more needs to be done to improve the accessibility of the built environment.
- Investment in the infrastructure to make it accessible will deliver a financial return to the city. Spectrum CIL estimate that there are approximately 37,500 Disabled People in Southampton. This number is forecast to grow significantly over the next 20 years.
- The developing Local Plan has the potential to have a positive impact on accessibility, including the accessibility of new housing to be built in the city.
- Partnership and place are key, everybody has a role to play.

Accessibility and a guide to best practice – Anna Nelson, Chief Executive and David Livermore, Director of Business Development at AccessAble

- A presentation was delivered by Anna Nelson and David Livermore providing an overview of the key features of an accessible city.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
 - 14.1m Disabled People in the UK; 4.5m carers; 1 in 4 households affected by disability; 45% of people aged 65+ have a disability; Potential UK audience of 18m; £274bn estimated value of the ‘purple’ pound.
 - Good accessibility is also important for older people and parents
 - AccessAble have surveyed the accessibility of over 125,000 venues and work with over 350 partners, including 110 local authorities.
 - AccessAble work with the University of Southampton and NHS in Southampton, including University Hospitals Southampton. They are among the examples of good practice in Southampton with regards to the provision of accessibility information.
 - 3 key facets of accessibility - Information provision (pre-arrival), the welcome they receive (as they enter) and the physical space itself.
 - AccessAble support partners to deliver against each of these facets – from the Access Guides, enabling people to understand all the essential information they need prior to arrival – to training for staff, to ensure they are comfortable and confident about their engagement with disabled customers – through to insight reports highlighting and prioritising areas of improvement – from the wider estate, to individual buildings, to key challenges.
 - **Information provision** – *‘Over ¾ of disabled people have not visited somewhere because they could not find the information they needed.’*

- Information about accessibility has the power to make decisions – informed choice.
- Need to have accessibility information where people expect to find it. Avoid the need to search for the information.
- Sheffield City Council were identified as an example of good practice – Through the Accessible Sheffield project they are working on a citywide scale with AccessAble, Disability Sheffield and Nimbus Disability to support the ambitions of Sheffield to become an accessible and fairer city for all. Access Guides from AccessAble have detailed access information for over 2,000 venues in Sheffield.
- **The welcome** – *‘57% of disabled people said they faced discrimination due to poor staff attitudes’*
- Learning and training – Staff need to be comfortable and confident about their engagement with disabled customers. Training shaped by Disabled People.
- **The physical space** – *‘66% of disabled people have faced discrimination due to physical access issues.’*
- A range of different solutions may be available that do not detract from the charm of a building or the public realm. Some changes can be done for little or no cost. Others may need longer term planning with a series of improvements made over time.
- More to accessibility than Part M of building regulations – be ambitious.
- Accessible toilets and changing rooms are a key challenge for many Disabled People.
- Need to update information on accessibility as improvements are made.
- Key mistakes include assuming that architects will design accessible buildings – Planning has role to play in promoting accessible buildings.
- Examples of good practice include:
 - Chester – EU Access City Award winner in 2017. Innovative approach to ensuring heritage sights were inclusive and accessible. Invested in accessible transport. Employed Access Officer and worked with the disability forum. Council invested in changing places and accessibility built into new council owned buildings.
 - Blackpool – 3-year programme of physical accessibility improvements, information provision, employment and training. Co-production led by disability group.
 - Islington – Co-production in practice. Local forum chaired by the council. External experts used to identify challenges with the public realm. Forum used to prioritise challenges.
 - Southbank London – Brought key stakeholders together, investment to make Southbank more accessible.
- To make citywide changes to accessibility requires a culture of continuous improvement, leadership, welcoming the challenge, continual engagement with Disabled People in the city with a range of impairments, and, informing people about improvements. There is no silver bullet.

Overview of support for carers in Southampton – Ian Loynes, Chief Executive, Spectrum Centre for Independent Living

- A presentation was delivered by Ian Loynes summarising the accessibility challenges experienced by people with disabilities in Southampton as a result of the physical infrastructure of the city.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
 - Compared to many places, Southampton is generally a good place to work and live for many Disabled People.
 - However, significant challenges remain, particularly for less well 'understood' Disabled People.
 - The City Council does not 'learn' – people come and go within the Council who have or gain expertise with respect to access.
 - The City currently has no Accessible Information standard - adopting a basic minimum standard will ensure information is accessible to the majority.
 - Accessible venues remain an issue in Southampton.
 - Shopmobility Schemes – 2 in city centre, none in district centres.
 - Toilets – Accessible toilets in particular are in short supply in Southampton - Larger Public Places should have Changing Places provision.
 - Awareness of improving access is poor in the Planning Dept and the appetite to improve accessibility in Southampton is questionable.
 - The disability element of the Equality Impact Assessments undertaken in Southampton are often poor. They are generally not developed with Disabled People.
 - Spectrum undertook an Access Audit of the City Centre for Go! Southampton in 2020. This raised a number of issues, and potential solutions that will help inform discussion at future Panel meetings. This will be circulated to the Panel and added to the evidence log.
 - Good practice - The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in Scotland has published a guide on the principles of Inclusive Design as it relates to the built environment. The key principles outlined are:
Inclusive – Responsive – Flexible – Convenient – Accommodating - Welcoming – Realistic
 - Ask the Disabled People of Southampton – They have a lifetimes experience – much better than any 'Expert' - 37,500 Experts by Experience in Southampton.
 - Think about how places are used and how they function as entities.
 - We need to get more understanding of the needs and ambitions of Disabled People. Human beings at the end of the day make the difference.

RESOLVED that the comments and presentations made by Guy Van Dichele, Executive Director of Wellbeing (Health & Adults), Southampton City Council; Anna Nelson, Chief Executive and David Livermore, Director of Business Development at Accessible; and, Ian Loynes, Chief Executive, Spectrum Centre for Independent Living be noted and used as evidence in the review.