

# BRIEFING PAPER

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**SUBJECT:** Accessible Southampton Inquiry – Progress Update  
**DATE:** 13 July 2023  
**RECIPIENT:** Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

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## **THIS IS NOT A DECISION PAPER**

### **SUMMARY:**

1. The Council's Scrutiny Inquiry Panel carried out an inquiry on Accessible Southampton in 2021/22. This briefing paper is an outline of the progress the Council has made since the response to the Inquiry recommendations were adopted by Cabinet in October 2022.

### **BACKGROUND and BRIEFING DETAILS:**

2. The Council's Scrutiny Inquiry Panel carried out an inquiry on Accessible Southampton in 2021/22. The set objectives of the inquiry were:
  - a. To identify whether the physical infrastructure of the city creates barriers for disabled people to access all Southampton has to offer.
  - b. To identify good practice being employed to improve the accessibility of towns and cities elsewhere.
  - c. To identify what initiatives and approaches could work well in Southampton to improve the accessibility of the city.
3. The Inquiry made recommendations relating to the following themes:
  - a. To Improve the accessibility of Southampton's built environment
  - b. To improve the accessibility of Southampton's public transport and related infrastructure
  - c. To improve the accessibility of Southampton's information and communication
  - d. To improve the accessibility of Southampton's public facilities and services
  - e. To improve the ownership and culture of accessibility.
4. A progress update for each theme is listed below:

#### **Improve the accessibility of Southampton's built environment**

5. A new planning policy has been drafted to be included within the draft Local Plan. The "Accessibility and Inclusive Design" policy aims to address the previous gap in planning policy. It should be noted that whilst drafting the policy, the Council obtained advice on aims and correct terminology from Spectrum before the policy went out to public consultation. The draft policy is now in the Draft Local Plan (Policy DE5). In addition, the Local Plan now has standardised references to disabled people and made it clearer that development should be accessible to, and mindful of the needs of, all people regardless of age or reduced mobility.

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6. A review has been carried out on Southampton's Streetscape Toolkit. The Toolkit has reviewed the materials and pallet that is used in public spaces, with a view to making a more unified pallet which will take into account the needs of people with mobility issues. The Toolkit will be submitted to the next Accessibility Forum in July for their comment.
7. An Accessibility Forum has been established by the Council, with its first meeting held on 26 January 2023. The Terms of Reference have been adopted for the meeting, with the next meeting to be held in July 2023. A dedicated website and email address has been set up for members of the Forum at <https://www.southampton.gov.uk/travel-transport/local-transport-plan/the-accessibility-forum/>. The Forum was chaired by the Cabinet Member for Transport (now Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport) and had representatives from the Council's Integrated Transport team, Ward Councillors, GO! Southampton and interest groups such as Southampton Sight, Mencap, Spectrum, Carers Partnership Board, Cycle Campaign and Sustrans. A request from the meeting is that for the next meeting more detail is provided on bus operations in the City, including the Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan.
8. The Council has not employed an Access Officer at this time. No available budget provision has been made to create the role within the structure. Management of the Accessibility Forum has been managed within existing staff roles.
9. As part of a wider District Centre improvement project, a review is underway of the Bitterne District Centre toilet block to determine if a changing places toilet can be included in a proposed refurbishment project. The Council will continue to monitor funding opportunities / government grants and apply where appropriate.

## **To improve the accessibility of Southampton's public transport and related infrastructure**

10. The Council's Transport Delivery Team has conducted a site audit with user groups from the Accessibility Forum as part of the Bitterne District Centre improvement project. The site audit has identified targeted measures that will now be taken into detailed design for improvements to connections to the District Centre for disabled people. Works are anticipated to be carried from Spring 2024.
11. The Council has a network of Real Time Information displays at bus stops which show the arrival time of the next bus at a stop. The Council have made adjustments to the font size and brightness of displays following consultation with user groups from the Accessibility Forum.
12. As part of our Bus Service Improvement Plan, a new Enhanced Partnership has been entered into in May 2023 with bus operators and the Council to improve the quality and overall provision of bus services in the city. The Enhanced Partnership outlines roles and responsibilities for the Council and for operators, with an action plan on how to improve satisfaction with local bus services, bus fares and ease of disabled access in the bus network. As part of the Enhance Partnership, a public forum will be established to provide the community input into the bus improvement process which members of the Accessibility Forum will be encouraged to contribute to.

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13. A Micromobility Equalities Forum has been established, which is a Solent wide partnership to help make the e-scooter and e-bike schemes more accessible. The Forum will meet every three months between members and the two operators Voi and Beryl. The next meeting will be on 5 July 2023. The Forum has actively asked for members that can represent disabled people to provide views on the e-scooter and e-bike programme.

## **To improve the accessibility of Southampton's Information and communication**

14. The Council has met with Rose Road Association on their work to create an access guide for people with mobility issues to access areas in the city centre (for example walking from Central Station to the Cultural Quarter). A project is now underway to incorporate this work into the upcoming Local Cycling and Walking Plan that the Integrated Transport Team is working on which will identify improvements to local walking / cycling which will include an update to a base walking map.

## **To improve the accessibility of Southampton's public facilities and services**

15. As highlighted above, the Council has conducted a joint site audit to feed into the Bitterne District Centre improvement project. A similar audit is planned for the transport improvements associated with the Outdoor Sports Centre project with an inspection in Autumn 2023.

## **RESOURCE/POLICY/FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

16. The Sustainable Transport (Communities) Lead is currently coordinating the Accessibility Forum, with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport the Chair of the Forum.

17. The main policy document that is driving interventions for public transport and the urban realm are from Southampton's Local Transport Plan: Connecting Southampton 2040. Council's draft Local Transport Plan has now been updated to include recommendations from the Inquiry.

18. A budget has been reserved from the Integrated Transport Accessibility budget for small scale interventions that the Accessibility Forum recommends of £50,000 per annum. The next Forum meeting will resolve the projects for 2023/24 spend. The Council is also creating a database of outstanding works which will be used for future funding bids such as Active Travel Fund.

## **OPTIONS and TIMESCALES:**

19. Ongoing work will be done to address recommendations from the Accessibility Inquiry.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

20. Not Applicable

## **Appendices/Supporting Information:**

21. None

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