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SCRUTINY INQUIRY PANEL - ACCESSIBLE SOUTHAMPTON MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JANUARY 2022

Present: Councillors Vaughan (Chair), Rayment (Vice-Chair), Coombs and Streets

Apologies: Councillors Guest

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

The apologies of Councillor Guest were noted.

12. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

13. **ACCESSIBLE SOUTHAMPTON - ACCESSIBILITY TO INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION**

The Panel considered the report of the Service Director – Legal and Business Operations for the fourth meeting of the ‘Accessible Southampton Inquiry’. The Panel considered ‘Accessibility to information and communication’ and noted the presentations.

Summary of information provided:

What contributes to good accessibility in information & communication from Disabled People’s Viewpoint – Ian Loynes, Chief Executive, Spectrum CIL

- A presentation was delivered by Ian Loynes, summarising the key issues raised at the Accessible Southampton Focus Group meeting.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
 - Information and communication should be written to be understandable to the audience in question – This is not applied by all SCC services
 - If information or communication is aimed at the ‘general public’ then it needs to ensure that it will be accessible and understandable to all equality groups (including Disabled People)
 - Consider if all the intended audience will be able to access your chosen communication method
 - Use Plain English
 - Make it easy for staff to get it right - Provision of accessible info should not be a cost issue
 - SCC should consider having an Accessible Information Standard (Sans Serif font, minimum size 14pt)
 - Ability to easily produce other formats ‘on demand’
 - The language of disability is important – words matter (Best practice provided by Spectrum CIL and added to the Inquiry evidence log)

- Just common decency: Don't use words that people don't like - words to describe Disabled People, that we find offensive such as 'Handicapped' or 'Bed/House Bound' are still routinely used (and often inaccurate!)
- Just as some people prefer information in non-English languages, some Disabled People need information in other formats - i.e.: BSL, Braille, Audio, Easy Read, Makaton
- Client information should include preference for how they would like their information provided and should be applied consistently across an organisation
- All general information should say that other formats are available on request
- Whilst its hard/dangerous to generalise, many people still do not have access to the Internet - Yet more and more the only way to gain a service or information is via the Internet
- Access to services/information must remain available in a variety of ways. Invest in schemes which provide equipment / training to encourage more to benefit from the Internet
- Internet should provide a range of accessibility controls
- Provide easy access to a human being (easy to find Phone number)
- Far too many public meetings are still inaccessible to Disabled People
- To include as part of an access statement (e.g., public meetings will always be held in accessible venues). Checklist to ensure meetings are accessible
- Opportunity for accessible communication standards and language to be included in staff/Cllr inductions and training to improve awareness.

Communication Access Symbol – Rosie Dowty, Lead Speech & Language Therapist, at Southampton Community Learning Disability Service, Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust & Kate Dench, Learning Disability Joint Commissioning Manager at the Integrated Commissioning Unit

- Key points raised by Rosie Dowty during her presentation were as follows:
 - 1 in 5 people have a communication support need at some point in their life
 - Communication Access UK is an initiative developed in partnership by charities and organisations that share a vision to improve the lives of people with communication difficulties
 - No over-arching symbol for communication access in the UK until now. Communication Access UK have developed the Communication Access Symbol, a new disability access symbol underpinned by a completely free training package and standards
 - Communication Access UK has been developed for both organisations and individuals. Anyone can sign up to Communication Access UK and complete the training package
 - Individuals will receive certificates confirming that they have completed the training, while organisations will receive accreditation as Communication Accessible once they have committed to deliver the training and adhere to the standards
 - Organisations will then be placed on a national directory and can then display the Communication Access Symbol. Both certificates and

accreditation are valid for 12 months and will need to be renewed annually. Communication Access UK has been developed to be 100% free.

- The Communication Access Symbol has not been seen anywhere in Southampton yet
- No County/Unitary/District Council has been awarded the symbol yet – Would be good to start with SCC customer/community focussed teams
- Recognition that city wide support for the initiative would support the City of Culture ambitions as well as improving the lives of people with communication difficulties. Go! Southampton would be a key partner.

How the Council its information and communication accessible – James Marshall, Head of Customer and Communications, SCC

- A presentation was delivered by James Marshall.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
 - New Customer Access Strategy recently approved by Cabinet that sets the principles and ambitions for where the Council wants to be
 - Council accessibility standards:
 - Always start with the user/customer
 - Give people options
 - Design for the user who will find it the hardest
 - Plain English is critical
 - Keep it simple
 - Listen to feedback and review regularly
 - Use letters where appropriate to the audience
 - Guidance outlines key considerations:
 - Plain English
 - Minimum size 12 font
 - Use Ariel
 - Make accessible versions available
 - Use corporate template
 - The accessibility of the Council's website has increased significantly following the introduction of various template changes enabled by the new Content Management System – 99.2% of content now conforms with WCAG Level AA (statutory requirement)
 - Further changes to the accessibility of the website are planned
 - The Council is working to increase digital inclusion in Southampton through public access computers (see Appendix 2 – ICT provision in Southampton's libraries); training; Digital eagles; supported digital channels; working with partners (see Appendix 1 – SO:Let's Connect)
 - Translation - We have a contract in place with a translation service
 - Challenges - Big organisation with lots of systems and departments; Lots of priorities; Single view of the customer (client details known by one service but not another); Resources; Breaking bad habits
 - Improvements have been made over the past 18 months, but we acknowledge this is a journey that requires ongoing effort to continuously improve
 - The Council has a Customer Experience Programme which is making improvements:
 - To improve digital channels
 - Set standards and redesign services with a customer focus

- Deliver customer service and related training to all council staff
- Coordinate activity to support digitally excluded customers
- Recognition that more needs to be done to engage with customers, including Disabled People at the start of a process. Open to having a reference group to act as a critical friend to support SCC information and communications.

Written evidence: SO:Let's connect

- Information was submitted on-behalf of SO:Let's Connect. This project commenced in 2020 in response to services moving on-line during the lockdown. The service loans digital devices to people in Southampton, thereby helping residents become digitally connected. The pilot project has identified how important digital access is and funding is currently being assembled to enable the project to continue.
- The initiative was welcomed by the Panel and the Head of Customer and Communications was encouraged to refer residents to the service that were not digitally connected.