

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES

13 DECEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE – CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

PHYSICAL ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

1. Purpose of Report.

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee about how the Authority are responding to issues relating to access for disabled people in our communities, to introduce a presentation from Council officers.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority.

2.1 The Corporate Equality Scheme is a statutory scheme and a cross-cutting issue that impacts upon the work of the whole Council. It is linked to the Welsh language Scheme and the Council's Customer Care Programme, and supports the community cohesion agenda.

3. Background.

3.1 It was agreed at the Committee meeting on 19th July 2010 that Members would receive reports on certain topic areas related to their remit and that relevant representatives would be invited to the meeting to speak on a topic so as to achieve a broader review and wider engagement of the work area.

3.2 The second topic for the Committee to consider is an accompanying presentation from officers in the Authority's Property Services and representatives from Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People and Bridgend Visual Impairment Society on the work that is being undertaken to improve access in our communities for disabled people.

4. Current situation / proposal.

4.1 The Authority continues to make good progress in improving physical access to its properties in line with its Asset Management Plan (2021). The Authority has shown year on year improvement against the Consortium for Local Authorities (CLAW) performance indicators. These measure the percentage of the authority's operational buildings for which an access audit has been undertaken and access plans that have been put in place. The Authority now has access audits and plans for over 30% of its properties. To provide a coherent approach to this work an '*Access Improvement Strategy for Council Premises*' is currently being prepared.

4.2 This will build on the works the Authority has already carried out in order to meet its duties under the disability discrimination legislation. This has been replaced by the Equality Act 2010 which follows the same principles. The Act requires service

providers to make reasonable adjustments where a disabled person is put at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled due to a physical feature. This can be done by removing it, altering it or by providing a reasonable means of avoiding it.

- 4.3 The new strategy will set out a process to deliver a reasonable and realistic programme of physical improvements to be undertaken based on prioritised access audits and will involve local disabled people in the process.
- 4.4 In addition to this work the Council has established new a street Cafe, Goods Display and A-Board Sign licensing scheme in town centres in response to comments from local disabled people. The scheme enables the Authority to control the positioning of furniture and signage placed on the highway to ensure that routes are safer for all users. It is intended that this will help make pedestrianised areas safer for disabled people, especially blind and visually impaired people.
- 4.5 The Authority has continued to improve its engagement with local disability groups such as the Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People, Bridgend Visual Impairment Society, the Stoke Association, Every Link Counts, Bridgend People First and the Glamorgan Deaf Club through cost-effective and focused activities. An outcome of this engagement was the successful '*Access Quest*' event held on September 2010. The event was organised by the Coalition and hosted by Bridgend Citizen Advice Bureaux.
- 4.6 Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People is an advocacy organisation whose main activities are:
- To campaign for improvements in the quality of life for Disabled People in Bridgend County Borough.
 - To meet and network with other Disabled People within Bridgend area and across Wales.
 - To ensure your voice is heard about issues important to you and other disabled people living in Bridgend County Borough.
 - To have a strong united voice with other disabled people.
 - To ensure the Coalition is representative of all disabled people.
 - Obtain the support of other Coalition members.
 - To be a part of the Disability Movement in the UK.
- 4.7 The event was opened by the First Minister for Wales, Carwyn Jones AM and was supported by Cabinet Members. Representatives from HMP & YOI Parc, Elected Members and officers from various Council services took part.



4.8 The Coalition arranged for officers to shadow five groups of local disabled people while they undertook a range of activities in and around Bridgend town centre, such as paying bills or visiting cafes. The aim was to give officers an insight into some of the day-to-day barriers disabled people face. The groups visited various council premises and businesses. The Coalition will be providing these organisations with feedback on the following areas:

- staff attitudes;
- physical access;
- facilities for disabled people;
- communication and availability of information.



4.9 People who took part in the half-day event found it very useful and a very good experience. Below are some comments from officers who took part:

‘I learnt a lot about how other people react to disabled people.’

‘It was a good learning process that I hope to be able to use in the future when considering traffic and road safety related matters.’

‘It has given me a greater awareness of the problems encountered by disabled people.’

‘I am more aware of how important things are now – such as the position of drop kerb crossings at junctions and the need to avoid locating temporary obstructions in walkways, like A-frame signs changing from day to day.’

4.10 The event was helpful in raising the profile of the Coalition and recruiting new members to become involved in it. An article about the event appeared in the Glamorgan Gazette on 30th September 2010 which raised public awareness about access issues and attitudes that impact on disabled people daily.

4.11 The Council will build on this by continuing to work with local disability groups to assist it to deliver on its corporate commitments on equality and community cohesion over the coming year.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework& Procedure Rules.

5.1 As this is an information report, there are no proposed changes to the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 Whilst no equality impact assessment has been carried out this report provides the Committee with information which will positively assist in the delivery of the Authority's equality duties.

7. Financial Implications.

7.1 There are no financial implications.

8. Recommendation.

8.1 The Cabinet Committee - Equalities notes the content of this report and the presentations by officers from the council's Property Services and the representatives of Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People and Bridgend Visual Impairment Society.

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Background documents:

Bridgend County Borough Council Corporate Equality Scheme 2009-2012.