

# Brighton & Hove City Council

## Tourism, Equalities, Communities, & Culture Committee

## Agenda Item 61

**Subject:** Accessible City Strategy Update

**Date of meeting:** 9th March 2023

**Report of:** Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods,  
Communities

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**Ward(s) affected:** All

**For general release**

### **1. Purpose of the report and policy context**

1.1 This report updates the committee on the development of the council's first organisation-wide, holistic, and integrated Accessible City Strategy. It provides an overview of the draft strategy and priority council-wide actions and builds on the last update presented to this committee in September 2022.

### **2. Recommendations**

2.1 The Committee notes progress on development of the Accessible City Strategy.

### **3. Context and background information**

3.1 Following the September 2022 update, Phase 2 of the strategy's development ran from July 2022 to March 2023 and concluded the following activities:

- a. Regular meetings of the officer Task and Finish group to steer and inform engagement with each directorate to secure awareness and understanding of the strategy and to develop actions to deliver the aims of the strategy.
- b. Action planning workshops facilitated by the council's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Team with each Directorate to support the development of bespoke actions for inclusion in the strategy's action plan.
- c. Meetings of the Disability Panel (section 5 for detail on the Panel) to establish and consolidate its purpose and membership and to provide external stakeholder oversight of the development of the strategy. Four disabled individuals were recruited onto the panel.

- d. Meetings of the Wider Reference Group (section 5 for detail on the Group) to receive input and comments from a wide range of disability organisations.
- e. The drafting of the front end of the strategy by Freeney Williams (consultant appointed to assist with the first phase of the strategy's development and conclusion of the strategy) and council officers.
- f. Facilitation of an online staff focus group by Freeney Williams to capture the lived experiences of disabled BHCC staff as city residents
- g. Presentation of the draft strategy and actions to key internal equality governance groups, including the Corporate Equality Delivery Group chaired by the Chief Executive, the five Directorate Equality Delivery Groups, the city's Deaf Services Liaison Forum and its Equality and Inclusion Partnership, and the council's Disabled Workers and Carers Network for feedback.
- h. Collected quantitative and qualitative data to inform the strategy content.

### **3.2 Principles, Themes and Council-wide Priority Actions**

- 3.2.1 The engagement undertaken in both phase 1 and phase 2 of the strategy's development signalled that the council needs to clearly communicate the principles and approach alongside the strategic changes it will make to work towards its goal of a making Brighton & Hove welcoming, inclusive and accessible for the diverse community of people who live, work, and visit the city, inclusive of their access requirements.

### **3.3 Draft Principles**

- 3.3.1 From the development process the emergent principles for the strategy include following a social model of disability, which says that people are disabled by barriers in society, rather than by their disability or difference; being informed by best practice, sensitive to diverse and multiple identities that co-exist with disability and going beyond the minimum legal compliance with the Equality Act wherever possible.
- 3.3.2 Further, that the council adopt inclusive and accessible design as standard for services, projects, policies, and practice, so that these can be as barrier-free as possible as a matter of course. Where barriers remain for individuals, inclusive and reasonable adjustments will be required as legally mandated.
- 3.3.3 The strategy should adopt the disability rights approach of "Nothing without us", which supports the involvement of disabled individuals and groups.

### **3.4 Draft Themes and Council-Wide Priority Action**

- 3.4.1 Through the process of developing the Accessible City Strategy, three strategic themes have been identified for the whole council to work towards throughout the proposed 5-year duration of the strategy. Under each theme a proposed action applicable across all the directorates is emerging.

- 3.4.2 The first strategic theme identified is 'Engagement: communicating and collaborating'. The priority action is to increase and improve communication and engagement with disabled residents, service users, customers, tenants, aligned to a new engagement strategy being developed for the whole council. Our engagement should be nuanced and intersectional. It should be used proactively to change to council policy and practice.
- 3.4.3 The second strategic theme identified is 'Data: collecting and using'. The priority action is to improve the collection, analysis, and application of qualitative, quantitative, and intersectional data regarding disabled residents (be they service users, customers, tenants) to better understand their access to and experience of services, using this proactively to inform service improvement.
- 3.4.4 The third strategic theme identified is 'Policy and practice: reviewing and changing'. The priority action is to identify, review and co-produce key policies, plans, strategies, and work, embedding inclusive-design principles to boost their impact on outcomes for disabled people. This cannot be achieved without a commitment by the council to undertake disability-inclusive council-wide learning and development. This will likely take many forms over the lifetime of the strategy ranging from formal learning opportunities to case study workshops facilitated by the council's EDI team, as well as learning opportunities tailored by and to individual services.
- 3.4.5 The three strategically linked council-wide priority actions will be fulfilled by directorate-specific prioritised actions carried out over five years. Detailed SMART action plans are under development to aid strategy implementation once the strategy is approved.

### **3.5 Monitoring & Reporting**

- 3.5.1 The Accessible City Strategy will have multiple layers of accountability through rigorous monitoring and reporting. This will include progress reports to TECC committee and the city's Equality and Inclusion Partnership as well as to the Disability Panel and Wider Reference Group.
- 3.5.2 Internal monitoring will take place through the existing quarterly performance updates by each of the council's five directorates on their Fair and Inclusive Action Plan (FIAP). Each directorate's FIAP will include their Accessible City actions. This ensures that the Accessible City Strategy and the Fair and Inclusive Action Plan are aligned and avoids duplication of internal process. Updates on each directorate's progress are quality assured by the council's EDI team and via updates to the Corporate Equality Delivery Group.

## **4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options**

- 4.1 We already know that 1 in 5 (51,797 people, 19%) residents knows what it feels like to live with disabilities, and we have existing complaints,

challenges and service experiences that tell us we need to do significantly better and become more accessible and proactive with reasonable adjustments.

- 4.2 The council could continue to take a piecemeal legislation-driven approach to disability. However, we are aware that this approach produces pockets of excellence and poor practice across the council and inconsistency of outcomes and experiences for disabled people. Implementing the strategy aims to systemically shift the cultural, knowledge and practice of the council and embed accessibility and disability-inclusivity. Not only should this result in better experiences and outcomes for disabled residents but organisational capacity improvements if and where complaints reduce and experiences improve, potentially resulting in service efficiencies, and operational cost savings.

## **5. Community engagement and consultation**

- 5.1 Community engagement and consultation in relation to the Accessible City Strategy have been carried out with the support of our disability consultant, Freeney Williams. We are currently carrying out further engagement with the Disability Panel and Wider Reference Group following feedback and requests. These groups were newly set-up in late 2022 as advisory and consultancy groups. Feedback and review of the strategy and appendices developed so far are also being undertaken by the council's Disabled Workers and Carers' Staff Network.
- 5.2 Disabled people's voices are vital to this work, and the two engagement groups are at the heart of developing and implementing the Strategy. The Disability Panel and Wider Reference Group centre the voices of people with lived experience of disability and speak to the disability activist slogan 'Nothing without us.' Both are meaningful groups that contribute their expertise and experience to making the strategy as inclusive as possible. Moving forward, the Equalities team is committed to developing an intersectional perspective and increasing representation in these groups at leadership and within membership of those from the lived experience of disabled people who are Black & Racially Minoritised, from LGBTQIA+ groups, faith communities and diverse marginalised communities.
  - 5.2.1 The Disability Panel provides strategic, expert, and impartial advice on developing, implementing, monitoring, and reviewing the Accessible City Strategy and its action plans. The chief executive of Possability People currently chairs the Panel. Panel membership is made up of disabled individuals and representatives from local disabled people's organisations. The organisations currently represented on the Panel are Mind in Brighton and Hove, Grace Eyre Foundation, Brighton and Hove SpeakOut, the MS Society, East Sussex Vision Support and Amaze. Meetings are also attended by the externally engaged disability consultant Freeney Williams. Four disabled individuals were recruited to the Panel following a public-facing recruitment campaign and a shortlisting and interview process.

- 5.2.2 Disabled person's organisations and disabled individuals are paid for preparing for and attending four Panel meetings per year, and members provide advice and guidance on relevant topics in relation to the strategy. Not all people with access requirements identify as disabled, including many D/deaf people. For this reason, a representative from our Deaf Services Liaison Forum (DSLFL) has a place on the Panel and contributes input from the perspective of Deaf Community members.
- 5.2.3 The Chair of the Disability Panel facilitates a feedback loop between the Disability Panel and the Wider Reference Group. The Wider Reference Group provides critical input and feedback to the Disability Panel and shares experiences of barriers and ideas for solutions with clear boundaries of engagement established through agreed Terms of Reference for both groups.
- 5.2.4 The Wider Reference Group provides crucial input and feedback to the Disability Panel. The role of the Wider Reference Group is to provide a safe, inclusive space for local groups and organisations to give their views and take part in discussions on how the city and the council services can become more accessible. The Group is a membership body, open to representatives from disabled people's organisations that support and empower disabled residents of Brighton and Hove – ideally with lived experience of disability themselves. There will be future opportunities for individuals with lived experience of disability to get involved with sharing their views.
- 5.2.5 Terms of reference and meeting papers for Disability Panel and Wider Reference Group meetings are produced in Easy Read and British Sign Language (BSL) versions to remove access barriers for participants. Braille versions can be procured as needed.
- 5.3 The local disability consultant Freeney Williams facilitated an online focus group in December 2023 to engage with disabled council employees and learn from their lived experience as city residents. They spoke about experiences of barriers related to living in the city, accessing shops and restaurants, and moving around the city. They were keen to see disability awareness training for business owners, and for the council to adopt inclusive design principles into all areas of its work and have an intersectional approach to disability.
- 5.4 A number of internal and external groups and forums have been involved in the strategy's development, providing critical friend feedback, and receiving updates. These include the council's Disabled Workers and Carers' Network and the multi-agency Equality and Inclusion Partnership and Deaf Services Liaison Forum.
- 5.5 We are working with a broad understanding of disability and have considered neurodiversity, mental health, and non-visible disabilities in the foundational building of the strategy. Our work has been informed by the lived experiences of our engagement group members and disabled council

officers living with these experiences. Further work has been identified in this area and this will develop both in the future as part of implementation.

## **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 The vision is to make Brighton & Hove welcoming, inclusive and accessible for the diverse community of people who live, work, and visit the city, inclusive of their access requirements. The intention is for an ambitious strategy, founded on a realistic understanding of council's current performance and changes it needs to make. It will take time to shift the culture, processes, policies, and practices. Having an organisation-wide, holistic strategy that takes a systems approach to change with clear action planning and monitoring in place, provides us with a roadmap for change and for being held to account.
- 6.2 Following further engagement with the Disability Panel and Wider Reference group the intention is to present the full and final draft strategy for approval at this committee in June 2023.

## **7. Financial implications**

- 7.1 Project management and leadership of the work is being carried out as part of the core business of the Communities, Equalities and Third Sector (CETS) team. A budget of £20,000 has been allocated from the CETS initiatives budget to support the work – principally funding the consultant. Financial implications arising from the strategy's action plan will be considered by the relevant service as part of their budget management processes and decisions on allocation of funding will be made in line with council's budget setting process.

Name of finance officer consulted: Mike Bentley  
February-2023

Date consulted: 13-

## **8. Legal implications**

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report which is for noting. All of the actions proposed are in line with the Council's powers and duties, in particular under the Equality Act 2010.

Name of lawyer consulted: Joanne Dunyaglo  
February-2023

Date consulted: 20-

## **9. Equalities implications**

- 9.1 The intention of this work is to address identified disadvantage and lack of access experienced by disabled people who live, work, study in or visit the city. The range of engagement planned with disabled people who share other characteristics in addition to their ethnicity will ensure that perspectives are heard from a wide range of people.

- 9.2 The work is central to the council's legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between communities, as well as to encourage civic engagement by under-represented groups.
- 9.3 This links into the positive duty in the Equality Act to promote opportunities for disabled people including participation in civic life. It also links in with and complements other key City Council strategies including, but not exclusively, the Brighton & Hove Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy, and the Fair and Inclusive Action Plan.
- 9.4 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Accessible City Strategy.

## **10. Sustainability implications**

- 10.1 No sustainability implications arise from this report.

## **11. Other Implications**

- 11.1 **Social Value and procurement implications:** There are no direct social value and procurement implications that arise from this report
- 11.2 **Crime & disorder implications:** There are no direct Crime and disorder implications arising from this report. Implementing this strategy may result in reducing ableism, increasing awareness of hate crime reporting and crimes against disabled people including complex and intersecting lived experiences.
- 11.3 **Public health implications:** There are no direct Public Health implications arising from this report. Implementing this strategy may result in increased awareness of disabled people lived experiences, health inequalities and disproportionate impact, intersecting and complex issues faced by disabled people and of disabilities generally.
- 11.4 **Corporate/City-wide implications:** The Accessible City Strategy supports to embed accessibility, disability-friendly and inclusive design in how the council thinks, works, and delivers as a service provider, employer, and civic leader. The strategy will work in synergy with other council strategies, seeking to embed disability-inclusivity for example, Directorates' Engagement Strategies, Digital Inclusion Strategy, Customer Service Strategy, People Strategy, future Corporate and Directorate Plans and strategies. It will align with the council's existing Fair and Inclusive Action Plan
- 11.5 This strategy also supports ongoing key initiatives around data and resident insights development, wider equalities advisory and support, including council-wide learning from complaints and service failures to pivot for holistic growth and improvement.

11.6 The intention is that the strategy and its implementation is a beacon of change and influences other organisations, in particular public sector organisations, to make change. It provides a mandate to the council, via its civic leadership role to ask for change.