

Brighton & Hove City Council

ESCHR Committee

Agenda Item 9

Subject: Accessible City Strategy

Date of meeting: 11 July 2023

Report of: Executive Director Housing,
Neighbourhoods and Communities

Contact Officer: Name: Emma McDermott
Tel: 07825 113 908
Email:
emma.mcdermott@brightonhove.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

1.1 This report explains the development of the council's first Accessible City Strategy and presents the draft strategy for approval. The strategy sets out the council's vision and aims for advancing the accessibility of the council and the city. The strategy is intentionally focused on developing a holistic, integrated systemic approach to change that will shift how the council thinks and works as a service provider and employer.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Committee approves the Accessible City Strategy (appendix 1).

2.2 That committee recommends the Accessible City Strategy for approval to the Strategy, Finance and City Regeneration Committee.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The Accessible City Strategy has been developed using what's called a top-down approach. This means that the council at a senior management level decided the council needed to develop a more strategic approach to accessibility and disability inclusivity rather than piecemeal, inconsistent, stop-start changes and improvements.
- 3.2 A top-down approach focuses on high-level planning and process. This is as opposed to a bottom-up approach which is more organic, usually driven by communities and residents and focuses on very specific individual areas/issues.
- 3.3 Regardless of the approach, residents' experiences and communities' feedback was a key driver to start developing the strategy. Alongside the reams of data and reports, locally and nationally, about the experiences of and outcomes for disabled people.
- 3.4 Taking a top-down approach means we focused on setting up the structures need for developing the strategy:
- A high-level stakeholder group to discuss strategic issues with. This became the Disability Panel.
 - To ensure we were offering as many voices as possible to be heard we then set up the Wider Reference Group to advise the panel.
 - Hired a consultant to scope out what the strategy might look like (we called this phase 1). This involved researching what other councils had done and talking with key stakeholders especially disabled people's organisations on the key issues for disabled people.
 - We also needed the buy-in of service managers in the council, so we set up a task and finish group with representatives from each of the council's directorates to inform the approach.
 - We then carried out action planning work with the directorates to draw out the priority areas for change.

These workshops were based on the stakeholder feedback collated by the consultant.

- 3.1 During Phase 1 of the strategy a local disability-led consultancy firm, Freeney Williams, was commissioned to draw up initial documents setting out the parameters and scope for the strategy and engagement structures; this Phase concluded in May 2022.
- 3.2 Phase 2 of the strategy's development ran from July 2022 to May 2023 and included 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 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 to receive input and comments from a wide range of disability organisations.
 - e) Facilitation of an online staff focus group by Freeney Williams to capture the lived experiences of disabled BHCC staff as city residents.
 - f) Presentation of the draft strategy and action plans to the Corporate Equality Delivery Group, Directorate Equality Delivery Groups, Deaf Services Liaison Forum, Equality and Inclusion Partnership and the Disabled Workers and Carers Network for feedback.
 - g) Sharing of the draft strategy with the Disability Panel, the Wider Reference Group and BHCC Executive Leadership Team through January to May 2023

3.3 Key documents produced to inform the strategy development are included in the Supporting Documentation section and appendices to this report.

3.4 Research undertaken indicates that Brighton and Hove City Council appears to be the first council in England to take such a holistic, integrated and council-wide approach to accessibility.

3.5 Strategy Aims

3.5.1 The strategy sets the council's vision for an accessible city and the aims for the council's work going forward on accessibility. In summary these are:

- Accessibility is a default consideration informing how we think, practice, and deliver.
- Adopting an approach based on the social model of disability.
- Going beyond compliance with the Equality Act, identifying opportunities and actions to go above and beyond.
- Actively identifying, removing, and preventing the creation of barriers.
- Adopting inclusive design as standard for services, projects, policies etc; to be barrier-free as a matter of course.
- Making inclusive adjustments for individuals where barriers remain.
- Adopting the approach of 'Nothing without us', and continuously improving current engagement practice
- Taking an intersectional approach; recognising some D/deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse people face multiple layers of barriers because of their additional intersecting identities, for example their ethnicity, legal status, class, sexual orientation, faith, gender.

3.6 Strategic Themes and Core Priority Actions

3.6.1 Through the process of developing the Accessible City Strategy, we identified three strategic themes and core priority actions that the whole council will be working towards throughout the duration of the strategy.

3.6.2 The first theme and action is ‘Engagement: communicating and collaborating’. We want to increase and improve our communication and engagement with disabled residents, service users, visitors, customers, and tenants, in alignment with a new engagement strategy being developed for the whole council. Our engagement should be accessible, inclusively adjusted, nuanced and intersectional, and being used proactively to show changes to council policy and practice.

3.6.3 The second theme and action is ‘Data: collecting and using’. We want to improve the collection, analysis, and application of qualitative, quantitative and intersectional data regarding disabled residents, service users, customers, visitors, and tenants to better understand their access and experience of services, using this proactively to inform service improvement.

3.6.4 The third theme and action is ‘Policy and practice: reviewing and changing’. We want to identify, review and co-produce key policies, plans, strategies, and work, embedding inclusive-design principles to remove barriers, better understand their impact and improve outcomes for disabled people, with intersectional insights. This is done alongside our own intersectional, disability-inclusive, council-wide learning and development.

3.6.5 Each of the council’s five directorate’s have identified and, in some cases, started working on specific actions relevant to their services to fulfil the three core priority actions. These are identified in appendix 1. The directorate-level actions will evolve and may change over the lifetime of the strategy, building year on year in response to services’ learning, communities’ feedback, and evaluation of their impact.

3.7. Monitoring and Reporting

- 3.7.1 The Accessible City Strategy will have multiple layers of accountability through rigorous monitoring and reporting methods. Monitoring and evaluation of our progress will take place every quarter through the council's existing internal performance management framework, with Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Officers acting as critical friends.
- 3.7.2 Performance will have community accountability via the Disability Panel and the Wider Reference Group, and ongoing engagement with disabled people and disabled people's organisations.
- 3.7.3 Key highlights of performance, progress and barriers will also be shared and reported to the council's Equality, Community Safety and Human Rights committee and the city's Equality and Inclusion Partnership.
- 3.7.4 Additionally, each of the council's five directorates has an Equality Delivery Group (DEDG). This group is responsible for leading and delivering the directorate's equality work, ensuring the directorate continues to embed equity, disability accessibility, anti-racism, and intersectional thinking in how it works as a service provider and employer. Actions will also be monitored for leadership through individual staff performance reviews with their manager.
- 3.7.5 These monitoring and reporting routes are already established through the council's Fair and Inclusive Action Plan with which the Accessible City Strategy is aligned.
- 3.7.6 For more information see 'Monitoring and Reporting' section of the strategy.

3.8 Data and Overall Approach

- 3.8.1 The strategy appendices contain national and local context data focused on disability. We recognise we have more work to do in terms of better understanding the experiences and requirements of disabled people living with other intersections, including race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender reassignment and faith and belief, both in the city and the council workforce. We will work to fill these data gaps as best we can as the directorates begin to implement their action plans, many of which involve improving their gathering and analysis of intersectional data.
- 3.8.2 It is important that as a council and a city, our disability and accessibility work is considerate of the multiple identities diverse disabled people hold and how these create multiple layers of exclusion, barriers, and discrimination. These include faith, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, including migratised communities and those who appear or present to be outsiders to the United Kingdom, increasing their vulnerability and risk to experiencing inequity, discrimination, barriers, and exclusion when also disabled, within the city, disability community, in interactions with local service providers, and all other areas of daily life.
- 3.8.3 This strategy adopts an approach based on the social model of disability, which holds that people are 'disabled' by the barriers operating in society that exclude and discriminate against them. Sometimes referred to as a 'barriers-approach', the social model provides a 'route map' that identifies both the barriers that disable people with impairments and how these barriers can be removed, minimised, or countered by other forms of support.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 Nearly one in five residents (51,797 people, 19%) in Brighton and Hove are disabled, as defined by the Equalities Act. If we do not implement this strategy, a lack of accessibility considerations and disability inclusion means that these residents, as well as disabled people visiting the city, will experience exclusionary and unsupportive council services.
- 4.2 We will not meet our anticipatory duty towards reasonable adjustments as a service provider and employer.
- 4.3 We will be eclipsing and remain unaware of the many diverse experiences and intersections of the lived realities of disabled people who live, work, study in or visit the city.
- 4.4 We already know only 1 in 5 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 supportive of reasonable adjustments.
- 4.5 There are significant benefits of implementing this strategy, including potentially reduced complaints and much improved service user and resident experiences.
- 4.6 Increased awareness of disabled resident and service user experiences may also result in service improvements, staff and customer experience improvements, capacity improvements if and where complaints reduce and experience improves, potentially resulting in improved service efficiencies, and operational cost savings when moving to support digital inclusion, accessibility, and inclusive considerations.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 Community engagement and consultation in relation to the Accessible City Strategy have been carried out in line with the Community Engagement Framework.
- 5.2 Disabled people's voices are vital to this work, and 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. As both groups evolve, we are committed to developing our intersectional perspectives and increasing representation from the lived experience of disabled people from Black and Racially Minoritised and LGBTQIA+ groups, faith communities and diverse marginalised communities.
- 5.3 The Disability Panel provides strategic, expert and impartial advice to us on developing, implementing, monitoring, and reviewing the Accessible City Strategy and resulting action plans. The Panel is currently chaired by the chief executive of Possability People and 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 Speak Out, the MS Society, East Sussex Vision Support and Amaze. Meetings are also attended by our externally engaged disability consultant Freeney Williams. We recruited four disabled individuals to the Panel following a public-facing recruitment campaign and a shortlisting and interview process.
- 5.4 Disabled person's organisations and disabled individuals are paid for preparing for and attending four meetings per year, and members provide advice and guidance to us on relevant topics in relation to the strategy. We recognise that not all people with

access requirements identify as disabled, including many 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.

- 5.5 The chair of the Disability Panel facilitates a feedback loop between the Disability Panel and the Wider Reference Group. The Panel will also monitor and review the Accessible City Strategy. 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 Purpose and Guidance documents for both groups.
- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 Terms of reference and meeting papers for the Disability Panel and the 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.
- 5.8 The externally engaged 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. The participants 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.

- 5.9 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. See the Appendices of the 'Brighton and Hove Accessible City Strategy 2023 – 2028' for additional detail.
- 5.10 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 groups' members and of council officers who participated in the focus group. Further work has been identified in this area and this will develop in the future as part of implementation.
- 5.11 The format of the strategy and its appendices is based on feedback from the Disability Panel and Wider Reference Group that a single document is overall more accessible than separate documents. A single document allows you to navigate between the information more easily and see the flow of the information better. One has the choice of reading the strategy, followed by the priority actions, followed by the appendices, or in fact reading in any order you like.
- 5.12 The appendices provide background and context that give detail, for those who would like it, on how the strategy was produced, what the terminology used means and why it's being used, and the data that has informed the strategy.

6. Conclusion

This report summarises the Accessible City Strategy that has been developed by the council. The Accessible City Strategy documents have been attached to the appendices of this report.

Based on the rationale outlined above in section 4 we recommend that the Committee approves the strategy.

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: Michael Bentley Date consulted: 25/5/23

8. Legal implications

8.1 No adverse legal implications arising from this report which is for noting have been identified. The actions outlined are considered to be fully consistent with the council's powers and duties, in particular under the Equality Act 2010.

Name of lawyer consulted: Victoria Simpson Date consulted 25/5/23

9. Equalities implications

9.1 The intention of this work is to address identified disadvantages 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 and 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 and is attached.

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 and 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 those with 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.

Supporting Documentation

Appendices and background documents

1. **Appendix 1:** Brighton and Hove Accessible City Strategy 2023 – 2028 and supporting appendices.