

Report to: Health and Wellbeing Committee, 29th July 2024

Report of: Corporate Director - Planning and Governance

Subject: ACCESSIBILITY IN WORCESTER

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Committee notes the actions underway to progress the Accessibility in Worcester project.

2. Background

2.1 At its last meeting, the Committee considered and approved a project for this year's scorecard: Accessibility in Worcester. The objective of the project, during this first 12 months, is to seek to answer the question: "How Accessible is Worcester?"

2.2 By finding ways to ask this question and listen to people who live with disabilities and health conditions, the City Council can identify improvements that can be made, whether to its own facilities and services or those provided by other organisations. Where the City Council does not have the power or resources to make the improvements itself, it can help to advocate for those improvements. The overall approach is to build a clear picture of how Worcester measures up as an accessible city, and for people to know that the City Council is going to be genuinely responsive and will maintain an open dialogue about accessibility with residents and visitors.

2.3 The Committee noted that the social model of disability explains how society puts up barriers which serve to disable people. Sometimes these barriers are visible but often they are hidden and taken for granted by other people. Also, the range of different disabilities and health conditions that people have to manage can create a huge variety in the sort of adjustments that they require to make the city more accessible to them.

2.4 As has been previously reported, there are no definitive accessibility standards which are universally accepted or implemented in the UK. Instead, it is a dynamic picture. People are experts in their own health and care needs and their experience of accessibility can be affected by changes in the local environment, advances in technology, access to transport, financial circumstances and other factors beyond their control.

2.5 The Council has committed under its Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to being an excellent local leader in inclusive practice. Since the Strategy was implemented 2 years ago, the Council has had some successes in taking on a leading role as advocate and convener of specific initiatives on inclusion (e.g. Black History Month, Speak up campaign) within the city. Members have agreed that for the third year of the EDI Strategy, this approach should be extended, with accessibility being a priority area of focus.

2.6 This project is separate and supplemental to the Council meeting its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the equality impact assessments undertaken on changes to Council services or implementation of new services or projects.

3. Information

3.1 It is proposed that the project will progress through a series of steps and focus on some practical actions, which should help provide some definition, to what is otherwise a very wide-ranging topic for the City Council, to tackle as a project. Working with other organisations as well as community groups in the city will be valuable to ensure that input can be received from a wide range of local people and visitors to the city.

3.2 The whole project needs to be launched and sustained through a multi-layered communication campaign and a strong online presence, so that feedback can be gathered and openly shared all the way along and used to guide next actions. The communications will need to be provided in accessible formats.

3.3 It is proposed that during this first 12-month period, the key steps are:

- Launch the campaign and explain its objective and how to get involved;
- Publicise what accessible actions the City Council has put in place and invite feedback;
- Ask people what features help make Worcester accessible to them and what features make Worcester feel inaccessible;
- Ask people how accessible they find Worcester City Council services and communications;
- Build up the networks of communities, customers and organisations with an interest in accessibility for disabilities and health conditions and specific lived experiences they want to share;
- Look for examples of best practice from other places;
- Convene a series of mini-conferences, in online and face-to-face and drop-in sessions to suit different access requirements, to invite input and feedback on specific projects which are within the City Council's control;
- Share with other organisations and agencies any feedback that relates to them or their services.

3.4 Set out below is a summary of specific accessibility actions that the Council has already put in place:

| Service area | Accessibility action | Supporting |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Refuse | Assistance with bins | Frail elderly, physical disabilities, people with temporary mobility issues as a result from recent surgery. |

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|-------------------|---|---|
| Regulatory | Mystery shopping for assistance dogs in taxis | Visual impairment, sensory impairments |
| Parks | Dog control orders and consultation in planning the design of open spaces | Neurodiversity, visual impairment |
| Customer services | Face to face services, audio recordings. Web accessibility. | Sensory impairments, cognitive impairments, visual impairment |
| Council buildings | Hearing loops | Hearing impairments |
| Toilet facilities | Changing Places toilet in Cornmarket, with 2 more proposed for parks Men's sanitary bins in public toilets | Physical disabilities |
| Buildings | Online signposting of Access-able ratings for city buildings | All disabilities and health conditions supported by Access-able |
| Employment | Disability confident employer level 2 | All disabilities and health conditions supported by this scheme |

3.5 Set out below are some areas where the Council has identified it could lead an improvement project or undertake some focussed engagement on accessibility actions:

| Service area | Accessibility action | Supporting |
|--------------|--|--|
| City centre | Assess where street furniture is enabling, and where is it disabling people | Physical disabilities, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, visual impairment |
| City centre | Assess the value of publicly accessible spaces for personal hygiene, welfare, privacy and dignity needs | All disabilities and health conditions |
| Play areas | Provide play equipment and play settings which meet the needs of a range of different disabilities | Physical disabilities, sensory impairment, neurodiversity |
| Tourism | Improve number of access guides; identify best practice within the city and elsewhere. Accessibility guides for events managed by the City Council | All disabilities and health conditions |

3.6 Individual project leads and project teams are being identified within the Council. Links with some of the other key organisations in the city are already being established to help deliver this project.

4. Monitoring and Reporting

4.1 Progress on the actions above will be monitored & managed internally through heads of service at Corporate Management Team meetings & the senior leadership team at CLT.

4.2 A summary of progress against each aspect of the overall project will be provided to the Health and Wellbeing Committee at each meeting. It should be noted that the play areas project is part of the Place and Economic Development Committee's scorecard but the engagement exercises will benefit from being part of this overall project.

4.3 An annual report and review will be provided to the Committee, setting out the progress and findings and giving Members the opportunity to set any new targets for a new action plan in the following year.

Ward(s): All
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Background Papers: None