

Report of	Meeting	Date
Interim Deputy Chief Executive	Overview and Scrutiny	Thursday, 5 October 2023

## Wheelchair Accessibility

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	N/A
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### Purpose of the Report

1. To update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding wheelchair accessibility across Council buildings and externally in Chorley.

### Recommendations

2. No recommendations but for this report to be noted.

### Reasons for recommendations

3. The report is for information only.

### Corporate priorities

3. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Housing where residents can live well	A green and sustainable borough
<b>An enterprising economy with vibrant local centres in urban and rural areas</b>	<b>Healthy, safe and engaged communities</b>

### Background to the report

4. The report provides an overview of the Council's responsibilities regarding the provision of wheelchair access to buildings for both employees and members of the public.
5. The report covers the Council's equality framework, legal framework, planning responsibilities, recruitment and employment, Council buildings and coordination with external bodies.

## **Equality Framework**

6. The Council has an Equality Framework which establishes our responsibilities where it comes to equality, diversity, and inclusion and sets out how we meet these duties. It is a policy that is shared by Chorley Council and South Ribble Borough Council and includes the different mechanisms and processes that we have for embedding equality. These ensure that with every decision, service, and policy, equality is robustly considered.
7. Equality considerations must be included at every part of the decision-making process. Some of the ways we do this include Impact Assessments.
8. An Impact Assessment must be completed whenever designing, procuring, or changing a service or policy to ensure their impact on equality is fully addressed. The Assessment considers a number of factors including impact for those with protected characteristics, stage of life, environment and reputation. An action plan should be developed to address any negative impacts.
9. Committee and Council reports include a comment on equality implications of proposed recommendations so that elected Members are aware of concerns and mitigating actions when taking decisions.
10. Every year Business Plans are produced across the Councils, which outline the delivery for each service over a twelve-month period. These detail potential equality implications, ensuring equality is considered at every part of the service design and delivery process.
11. During the business planning process, staff are invited to discuss and therefore influence the business plans for the year ahead, ensuring an inclusive approach to the design and delivery of our services and projects.

## **Legal Requirements**

### **The Equality Act**

12. The Public Sector Equality Duty is imposed on all UK public bodies by section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, to take equalities considerations into account when exercising any of their functions and taking decisions.
13. The duty imposed by section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010 on public authorities is one requiring them, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
14. The relevant protected characteristics that section 149 of the Equality Act covers are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.
15. As set out above Section 149 of the Equality Act provides that public authorities, when exercising their functions, must have due regard to the need to eliminate

discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons with protected characteristics and those that do not share them. Disability is one of the protected characteristics referred to in the Act.

16. As set out in the Councils equality framework an Impact Assessment is undertaken when a Council is designing, procuring, or changing a service or policy to ensure their impact on equality is fully addressed. Wheelchair users form part of the assessment, if negative impacts are identified these are addressed.

## **Building Regulations**

17. The Building Regulations establish standards that must be achieved in the construction of buildings.
18. Part M sets out minimum standards for the design and construction of buildings to ensure that they are safe and accessible for everyone, regardless of a persons' physical abilities.
19. Part M is an important aspect of building design that relates to accessibility and aims to ensure that buildings are designed and constructed in a way that provides equal access for all, regardless of their physical abilities. The importance of Part M lies in its ability to ensure that buildings are accessible, safe, and convenient for everyone to use.
20. One of the main reasons why Part M is so important is that it helps to ensure that buildings comply with legal requirements, including the Equality Act 2010. By meeting these legal requirements, building designers help to prevent discrimination against disabled people and ensure that everyone has equal access to public spaces.
21. The Council is committed to designing buildings that are accessible, creating spaces that are safer and more convenient for everyone, including older people, parents with young children and people with temporary injuries or impairments. This will help to improve the overall usability of the building and create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone.

## **Planning**

22. The process of determining planning applications can do much to ensure that accessibility is addressed within new developments.
23. Accessibility is addressed in planning policy guidance documents at the national and local levels. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in England, for example, emphasises the importance of creating inclusive and accessible environments.
24. The concept of "inclusive design" is promoted, which means that new developments and buildings should be designed from the outset to be accessible and usable by everyone. This includes considerations for those with mobility impairments, sensory impairments, and other disabilities.
25. Developers and applicants are typically required to submit access statements as part of their planning applications. These statements outline how accessibility has been considered in the design and how the development will meet the needs of all users.

26. The planning process involves public consultation, where residents and stakeholders can provide input on proposed developments. This includes feedback on accessibility concerns, ensuring that the community's needs are considered.
27. Accessibility extends to transportation and infrastructure planning. Ensuring that public transport, roads, and pedestrian routes are accessible is crucial. This includes the provision of accessible public transportation and the consideration of walking and cycling routes for people with disabilities.

### **Council Buildings**

28. Previous accessibility works have been undertaken to Council Buildings to allow wheelchair access across the operational estate.
29. No further works are currently planned regarding wheelchair accessibility however once the next project has been identified accessibility will be a consideration of the design process.
30. Councils passenger lifts are maintained and inspected quarterly to ensure their safe operation.
31. Council platform lifts are maintained and inspected every 12 months to ensure their safe operation.

### **HR - Recruitment and employment**

32. We are committed to equality of opportunity at all stages of employment. This includes from the advertisement of jobs, the recruitment and selection process, and the professional development of our employees. Additionally, the Councils support the rights of all people to be treated with dignity and respect at work.
33. Some of the things we do as an employer to ensure equality is considered include:
  - a. Code of conduct: This establishes our expected standards of behaviour for all staff as well as for Councillors. This includes the right of both customers and employees to be treated with fairness and equality, in accordance with the equality strands as defined under the Equality Act 2010.
  - b. Complaints procedure: It is important to us that both our staff and customers feel safe. We have a robust grievance and disciplinary procedure, which ensures that all complaints or allegations are taken seriously and acted upon.
  - c. Equality training: We regularly review and update our equality training to ensure that our staff have the skills necessary to deliver our equality objectives and support improved outcomes. Equality training also forms a key part of our e-learning induction package and is mandatory for all staff members, with bespoke training provided when required.
  - d. Reasonable adjustments: We make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the diverse needs and circumstances of our staff and customers, such as in relation to parental responsibilities or a disability, in order to eliminate disadvantage. This can include from making information available in an accessible format, changing the physical environment of our office spaces, or flexible working arrangements.
34. The Council is Disability Confident and meets all of the requirements of the scheme including guaranteed interviews, proactive identification and implementation of reasonable adjustments, and a flexible approach to recruitment. Individuals with physical disabilities, including wheelchair users, are provided with equal opportunities

to access the recruitment process. This may include in-person interviews held in accessible spaces, or a remote selection process.

35. The Council's Workforce Strategy supports a flexible approach to work location, enabling hybrid and homeworking as appropriate. The organisation has long had a pioneering approach to flexible working and provides opportunities for flexible working to be discussed throughout the employment lifecycle, including during recruitment. A personalised approach incorporates adjustments for employees with disabilities to access a working pattern and location to support their individual needs.

### **External Bodies**

36. Chorley Council have provided funding to the charity 'Shop Mobility' for the last 17 years. This provision has allowed Shop Mobility to continue to operate. They offer a valuable service to members of the community who have difficulty with mobility, helping them to be more independent by offering an assortment of mobility vehicles within the town centre. Shop Mobility have recently expanded this service to one of Chorley's extra care facilities, Tatton Gardens.

### **Climate change and air quality**

37. There are no climate change implications arising from this report, which is for information.

### **Equality and diversity**

38. The equality and diversity implications are detailed within the report.

### **Risk**

39. There are no risk implications arising from this report.

### **Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer**

40. There are no direct financial implications of this report.

### **Comments of the Monitoring Officer**

41. The implications of the Equality Act 2010 are referred to in the body of the report.

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