

Access for Disabled People

Duration of the Review

September 2011 – August 2012

Task Group Membership

Councillor Andrew Fry (Chair of the group May 2012 – August 2012)
Councillor Alan Mason (Chair of the group September 2011 - April 2012)
Councillor Mike Chalk (May 2012 – August 2012)
Former Councillor Anita Clayton (September 2011 – April 2012).
Councillor Bill Hartnett (September 2011 – April 2012).
Councillor Brenda Quinney
Councillor Yvonne Smith (May 2012 – August 2012).

Democratic Services Officer

Jess Bayley

Date for Submission of Report

August 2012

Access for Disabled People

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Access for Disabled People



Councillor Andrew Fry



Councillor Alan Mason

As joint Chairs of the Access for Disabled People Task Group we have had a chance to look at the way we perceive people with disabilities. One of the reasons for undertaking this programme of work was to try and decrease the divide between able bodied and disabled persons. With the sterling work that has been undertaken by the Councillors involved, and the willingness of all of the Officers and private companies to take part and contribute we feel that we will be able to address some of the problems that impact on people with disabilities. There are things that able bodied persons do, which are simple. The same thing for a disabled person is a major challenge.

There are still a number of instances in Redditch where we treat people with disabilities with less care than we do their able bodied counterpart. Simple things to an able bodied person, like a kerbside affect not just disabled persons but also elderly persons, who struggle when walking up and down raised kerbs. Also the way disabled persons are sometimes treated on buses. There is a special space on a bus for disabled scooters to park. However, other people including young mothers with pushchairs, try to claim these spaces for themselves. We have not learned to show consideration. Although it is better now than it used to be there is still a divide between able bodied and disabled persons.

We are very proud of this study and hope that it might be of use to other Councils when they are looking at their responsibilities to their constituents. Although this study looks at things that need improving and the Council and partner organisations will hopefully implement some of our proposed actions in the near future, we still need to be diligent and to foresee areas where extra work will be needed to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

We covered a lot of ground in a short space of time and one of the main reasons was the work rate of the support Officer, Jess Bayley. She was always available for all of us and was willing to help and advise at a minute's notice.

Hopefully this review will help alleviate the lot of people with disabilities.

Councillors Andrew Fry (Chair of the review May –August 2012) and Alan Mason (Chair of the review September 2011 – April 2012).

Access for Disabled People

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Contents Page

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>page 1</i>
<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>page 2</i>
<i>Background</i>	
• <i>Review Objectives</i>	<i>page 6</i>
• <i>Approach to the Review</i>	<i>page 7</i>
<i>Redditch Borough Council</i>	
• <i>Background</i>	<i>page 8</i>
• <i>Previous Review Work</i>	<i>page 8</i>
• <i>Equality Act 2010</i>	<i>page 8</i>
• <i>Current Support – Building Control</i>	<i>page 9</i>
• <i>Current Support – Policy Team</i>	<i>page 9</i>
• <i>Shopmobility</i>	<i>page 10</i>
• <i>Dial A Ride Service</i>	<i>page 10</i>

Contents Page

General Issues of Interest

- **Lifetime Homes** **page 13**
- **Redditch Town Centre Redevelopment** **page 14**

Disabled Parking

- **Sources of Evidence** **page 15**
- **Current Disabled Parking Provision** **page 15**
- **Blue Badge Holders** **page 15**
- **Blue Badge Changes** **page 16**
- **Civil Parking Enforcement** **page 16**
- **Town Centre Pedestrian Area –
Traffic Regulation Order** **page 17**
- **Alexandra Hospital – Disabled Parking provision** **page 18**
- **Consultation Feedback** **page 19**
- **Car Parking Standards – Worcestershire** **page 19**

Contents Page

Access to Taxis

- **Sources of Evidence** page 20
- **Adapted Vehicles** page 20
- **Legal context** page 20
- **Taxi Services in Redditch** page 21
- **Adapted Vehicles – Redditch** page 22
- **Consultation Feedback** page 22
- **Wyre Forest District Council** page 22

Access to Buses

- **Sources of Evidence** page 24
- **Legal Context** page 24
- **Redditch Core Strategy** page 25
- **Consultation Feedback** page 26
- **Bus Services in Redditch** page 26

Contents Page

• Bus Drivers – Training	page 26
• Electric Scooters – Access to Buses	page 27
• Audio-Visual System	page 27
• Safe Journey Cards	page 28
• Worcestershire Transport Authority	page 28
Consultation	
• Approach to Consultation	page 29
• Questionnaire	page 29
• Redditch Access for Disabled Group	page 29
• Redditch Older Peoples’ Forum	page 30
• Feedback – Common Trends	page 30
Recommendation 1	page 32
• Recommendation 1 a	page 34
• Recommendation 2	page 35

Contents Page

Recommendation 3	page 37
Recommendation 4	page 39
Recommendation 5	page 42
Recommendation 6	page 44
Recommendation 7	page 46
Recommendation 8	page 48
Recommendation 9	page 49
Recommendation 10	
• Recommendation 10 a	page 51
• Recommendation 10 b	page 53
• Recommendation 10 c	page 55
• Recommendation 10 d	page 57
Overview and Scrutiny Resolutions	
• Resolution a	page 62

Contents Page

• Resolution b	page 63
Conclusion	page 64
Expert Witnesses	page 68
Bibliography	page 70
Glossary	page 76
Overview and Scrutiny Contacts	page 79
Appendix A: Draft Recommendations – April 2012	page 65
Appendix B: Disabled Parking Map	page 80
Appendix C: Questionnaire Template	page 81
Appendix B: Questionnaire Feedback	page 83
Appendix d: Map of Proposed Parking Arrangements – Former Covered Market Area	page 98

Introduction

The Access for Disabled People Task Group has completed a detailed investigation of issues impacting on people with disabilities in Redditch. The group focused in particular on the experiences of people with disabilities attempting to access Redditch town centre using local bus services and taxi services as well as provision of disabled parking spaces.

The Councillors considered the experiences of people with all types of disabilities including mobility impairments, sensory impairments and learning difficulties. The group recognises that people with different types of disabilities encounter different practical barriers when accessing a location and they have attempted to address these varying needs in their recommendations.

The group was pleased to discover examples of good practice during the review which have been highlighted in the report. This included the positive feedback received from residents regarding the quality of services provided by local taxi companies.

This final report contains a detailed summary of the group's final conclusions.

Recommendations

We RECOMMEND that:

DISABLED PARKING

- 1) A user friendly version of the map (detailed in Appendix E) demonstrating the location of disabled parking spaces and Shopmobility in Redditch town centre should be produced and promoted on the Council's website, on the Redditch Matters e-magazine and on the Palace Theatre's website and should be promoted to local businesses to use.
 - a) The contents of this map should be reviewed every twelve months to ensure that the information remains accurate.
- Redditch Borough Council should work with the Redditch Town Centre Partnership, Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department and the Kingfisher Shopping Centre to introduce collection and delivery points in the town centre that could be used by vehicles transporting people with disabilities.

TAXI SERVICES

- 3) Taxi companies should be offered licences to operate adapted vehicles for a longer period of time than standard vehicles to incentivise taxi firms to increase the number of adapted vehicles in their fleets. The vehicles should be permitted to operate for these lengthier periods of time subject to passing the three inspection tests and the MOT that the Council's licensing regime requires for each vehicle.

Recommendations

- 4) Taxi drivers should be offered disability awareness training, which would include information about manually assisting people with disabilities, by Redditch Borough Council.

BUSES

- 5) Worcestershire County Council's Transport Department should work with local bus operators to apply for any future Better Buses Area Funding from the Department for Transport to finance the installation of audio-visual equipment on buses operating in Redditch Borough.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6) A disability awareness session should be delivered as part of the Member Development Programme at Redditch Borough Council.
- 7) Ward Members should be made aware that they can use their knowledge of the local community to assess the condition of the pavements and dropped kerbs located in their wards and report their findings for the consideration of Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department and Redditch Borough Council's Environmental Services.
- 8) The Council's Planning Department should consider arranging for funding from Section 106 agreements to be allocated to the installation of tactile signage in the town centre for the use of people with sensory impairments.

Recommendations

- 9) **Redditch Town Centre Partnership work with the Kingfisher Shopping Centre to introduce additional seating in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, involving an investigation of the ergonomics of the seating provided.**

- 10) **Officers undertake further work into the following areas that should be reported for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee at a later date:**
 - a) **a review of the potential to install a canopy over the ramp access to Shopmobility;**

 - b) **a joint review in partnership with Apollo 2000 of the potential for the Council to undertake landscaping work in the company's car park in return for using the car park as a collection and delivery point for Dial a Ride vehicles;**

 - c) **a joint review with the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, concerning the potential activation of the RNIB React system in the centre;**

 - d) **a review of the implications of introducing disabled parking spaces and a Dial a Ride collection and delivery point in the former covered market area, as detailed in Appendix E.**

Recommendations

The Executive Committee is also asked to **RESOLVE** to note the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's decision with regards to the group's following proposal:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should receive the following update reports in six months time:

- a) an update concerning the support provided by Officers to the Redditch Disabled Access Group in relation to disability issues; and
- b) a report monitoring the implementation of the group's recommendations.

Background

Review Objectives The Access for Disabled People Task Group was commissioned in September 2011 to address a number of core objectives. These objectives were altered during the course of the review when it became apparent that the focus was too wide.

The final objectives of the review were:

- a) to clarify legal requirements for disabled access to taxis and public transport (buses);
- b) to review current access for disabled people to public transport (buses);
- c) to review current taxi provision arrangements for disabled people;
- d) to identify car parking provision for disabled people;
- e) to interview representatives of local bus companies about provision for disabled people;
- f) to interview taxi representatives about provision for disabled people;
- g) to interview disabled people about any accessibility barriers they may have encountered in the town; and
- h) to identify any potential barriers to improving accessibility and any actions that could be taken to overcome these barriers.

Throughout the review the Councillors focused on access to Redditch town centre for people with all types of disabilities.

Background

Approach to the Review

The review was completed in two stages. The first stage focused on consultation with transport providers, Council staff and the public. Each member was awarded responsibility for addressing key themes independently. Responsibility was divided between the members of the group in relation to the following key themes:

- a) disabled access to taxis and licensing requirements;
- b) disabled access to buses;
- c) disabled parking and legal requirements for disability access; and
- d) community consultation.

The information obtained by individual Councillors was reported for the consideration of the group. The group also consulted Officers from the Council with regard to the financial and legal implications of a number of proposed actions. All the decisions about the group's final recommendations were made collectively and were based on the feedback that had been received from Officers, expert witnesses and local residents.

During the second stage of the review a draft report was delivered in April 2012 which outlined the group's initial proposals (Appendix A). At the request of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee further work was undertaken from May – August 2012. During this time the feasibility of implementing a number of the group's draft proposals was considered and relevant partner organisations were consulted about the implications for service delivery. Changes were made to the group's report and recommendations. In particular, the number of recommendations were reduced from 13 to 12 and the actions proposed in these recommendations were revised.

This report contains a detailed summary of the group's final conclusions.

Background Redditch Borough Council is not responsible for disabled access to public transport in the Borough. However, the Council has previously taken an interest in access for people with disabilities to civic buildings located in the town. The local authority is committed to addressing equalities issues and has adopted a *Single Equalities Scheme 2009/12*.

Previous Review Work In August 2004 a thorough audit was undertaken of disabled access to the Council's civic buildings and car parks, including Redditch Town Hall. The aim of the review was to ensure that building design features complied with best practice outlined in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. An Officer from the Building Control Department was appointed to act as the Council's Access Officer. This Officer provided advice in relation to building access and building regulations, regularly attended meetings of the Redditch Access for Disabled Group and advised Councillors about disability related issues.

Equality Act 2010 In recent years the legislative framework relating to disabled access has changed. The Equality Act 2010 replaced all previous legislative requirements detailed in previous disability discrimination acts. The Equality Act 2010 focused on the needs of people with "protected characteristics" which included age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The legislation recognised that there were practical barriers that were more likely to impact on people with disabilities.

Public bodies, including local authorities, were required to have a lawful duty of regard to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Redditch Borough Council

Current Support – Building Control

The new North Worcestershire Building Control Manager, with responsibility for Redditch Borough, has also been interviewed as an expert witness. Building Control Officers have relevant expertise in relation to access to buildings and have received specialist training in the field of building regulations. Building Control Officers take into account implications of building developments for disabled access on a case by case basis. Officers from this team also attend meetings of the Redditch Access for Disabled Group to advise on any issues relating to building access.

Current Support – Policy Team

The Council's Policy Team provides support in a variety of ways in relation to all forms of equalities. The Council's Equalities Policy Officer and Policy Manager were consulted as expert witnesses during the course of the review.

Equality Impact Assessments, which involve systematically analysing a policy or function to identify what effect, or likely effect, that policy has or might have on different groups in the community, are produced on a regular basis. This enables the Council to identify and address actions that may potentially impact on particular groups in the community such as people with disabilities.

Council documentation can be obtained on request in a variety of different formats to suit the needs of people with disabilities. This includes provision of documentation using Braille and large print for people who are blind or who have visual impairments and audio CD provision for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The Council's Policy Team currently co-ordinates the work of Redditch Community Forum. The Community Forum was established in 2009 and comprises representation from the Voluntary and Community Sector. The forum is consulted over issues impacting on the local community and has previously discussed a range of equalities issues, including disability related issues.

Shopmobility Service

The Council operates a Shopmobility service in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre. This service provides customers with mobility impairments with an opportunity to use powered wheelchairs to travel around the shopping centre. The main Shopmobility base can be accessed at Car Park Two, which serves the shopping centre. However, delivery and collection services can be pre-booked from alternative locations during the morning and when three members of staff are at work.

The Shopmobility service can be accessed by customers from the entrance to Car Park 2 using a ramp. An anti-slip surface has been supplied for this ramp to help minimise the risk of customer falls. The ramp also receives priority clearing during periods of inclement weather, to ensure that the health and safety risks to customers are minimised. The Shopmobility service can also arrange to deliver scooters to a variety of delivery points, including the top of the ramp, upon request.

Redditch Borough Council operates a community transport scheme for the use of elderly, disabled and vulnerable residents who struggle to access other forms of transport. Journeys are booked in advance by registered customers, who can utilise the service to travel to various locations across the Borough. The Dial A Ride service operates a fleet of modern wheelchair accessible minibuses. Low rise steps are also provided for easy access. The Dial A Ride Service was the subject of a separate scrutiny review which took place in 2009/10.

Dial A Ride Service

The Dial A Ride service can currently utilise three designated delivery and collection spaces: at Shopmobility, Redditch Town Hall and the Palace Theatre. Arrangements can also be made to collect and deliver passengers to the rear of the Ecumenical Centre, though this location is unpopular with customers because the location is relatively isolated which makes customers feel vulnerable.

Concerns were raised during the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2012 that the Dial A Ride vehicles were causing health and safety risks when collecting and delivering

Redditch Borough Council

Figure 1

Dial a Ride buses can deliver customers to the Shopmobility service at the entrance to the multi storey car park. This does not block access to the car park as two entrance points are provided for vehicular access.



Dial A Ride Service customers from Shopmobility. In particular, there were concerns that the buses were creating a barrier to other vehicles attempting to access Car Park 2 and consequently represented a risk for pedestrians.

In the second half of the review Members investigated these concerns in further detail. During this time, the group was advised that the Dial A Ride Service had been fully risk assessed. No concerns had been raised about the access for the Dial A Ride vehicles to Shopmobility by health and safety professionals and no complaints had been received about this issue from customers.

The group also visited Shopmobility in July 2012 to observe the Dial A Ride vehicles in situ. To ensure that Members appreciated customers' experiences the group undertook a short trip from Redditch Town Hall to the Shopmobility base using one of the service vehicles. To minimise the impact of this exercise on the service Members undertook this visit during a period when demand for the service was relatively low.

During the course of the visit to Shopmobility Members observed that collection and delivery arrangements at the Shopmobility base were not causing an obstruction to other vehicles accessing the multi-storey car park. This is clearly illustrated in Figure 1, p 11.

General Issues of Interest

Lifetime Homes

During the review the Councillors were provided with information about a variety of issues impacting on people with disabilities. This included information about the specific accommodation requirements of residents with different types of disabilities. In particular, the group was interested to learn about Lifetime Homes, which are designed to provide flexible and adaptable housing that meet the needs of people with different types of disability.

The subject of Lifetime Homes has been considered by Redditch Borough Council as part of ongoing preparation of the Redditch Core Strategy. Policy 8 in the draft Redditch Core Strategy, *Housing Provision*, requires that in order to provide flexible and inclusive housing in the Borough all new residential developments, including affordable housing, will be expected to comply with Lifetime Homes standards.

At a national level all new developments, including private developments, will have to consider building homes that comply with the Lifetime Homes standards by 2013. Prior to this date in Redditch private developers will be encouraged to implement the concept of lifetime homes in any new developments.

The Councillors considered proposing that action be taken to incorporate more specific requirements in relation to Lifetime Homes into the Redditch Core Strategy. Members of the group were, though, reassured to learn that at present the introduction of lifetime home standards will be mandatory in all new developments from 2013. The group is aware that legislative requirements in relation to planning policy can change. For this reason the group is urging the Council's Planning Advisory Panel, which focuses on planning policy issues such as the Core Strategy, to monitor implementation of Lifetime Homes standards.

General Issues of Interest

Redditch Town Centre Redevelopment

The review of disabled access to Redditch was very timely because it was undertaken at a time when Redditch town centre is in the process of being redeveloped. The strategic plans for the redevelopment of the town are detailed in the *Redditch Town Centre Strategy*. This document outlines a vision for the future of Redditch town centre and how this vision might be achieved.

Areas of the town designated for redevelopment within this programme extend across a wide area including Redditch Train Station and the former covered market area beside the Kingfisher Shopping Centre. Main areas of the town centre, including Alcester Street, Church Green East and St Stephen's Church, are also encompassed within the remit.

The Redditch Town Centre Partnership, a partnership comprising representatives of public, private and voluntary and community sector organisations, has been co-ordinating work to redevelop the town centre. The partnership is considering redevelopment work on a stage by stage basis through specific project work. Redevelopment work has already been undertaken on the site of Redditch Railway Station. Further work remains to be undertaken over the next few years.

For each project there is detailed consideration of the needs of specific groups, including people with disabilities. A number of the group's recommendations are designed to enhance the potential of this redevelopment work to improve access for people with disabilities to Redditch town centre.

Disabled Parking

Sources of Evidence

A number of expert witnesses provided evidence in relation to disabled parking provision in Redditch Town Centre. This included the Council's Development Management Manager, Acting Development Control Manager, the GIS/Engineering Design Officer and the Dial A Ride and Shopmobility Manager. The group also consulted the lead Officer co-ordinating the Council's involvement in Redditch Town Centre Partnership and representatives of Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department and Planning, Economy and Performance Department.

Current Disabled Parking Provision - Redditch

Currently there are a number of disabled parking spaces situated in various locations in Redditch Town Centre. This includes the following areas:

- Car Park 7
- Church Road
- Church Green East
- Each of the Multi Storey Car Parks that serve the Kingfisher Shopping Centre
- Redditch Town Hall Car Park
- Redditch Train Station
- Trafford Park
- Trescott Road Car Park

(To view a detailed map of designated disabled parking spaces available in Redditch Town Centre please refer to Appendix C p 90).

Blue Badge Holders

A significant number of residents living in Redditch are eligible to park in disabled parking spaces. In November 2011 3,889 Redditch residents had registered for a disabled parking permit, or blue badge. By comparison, in Bromsgrove district in the same period there were 4,510 blue badge holders. In total, there were 30,000 blue badges in circulation across Worcestershire in November 2011. (These figures were provided by Worcestershire County Council in November 2011).

Disabled Parking

Blue Badges - Changes - A policy change occurred at the national level in relation to the disabled parking permit (blue badge scheme) during the course of the review. These policy changes occurred following a review of the scheme by a branch of the Department of Transport (DfT), the Blue Badge Improvement Service (BBIS). The changes were designed to standardise the process across the country and came into force in January 2012.

As part of this process an assessment matrix has been introduced to score a customer's eligibility for a blue badge based on the customer's responses to a number of set questions. Customer Service Advisers at each of the Worcestershire Hub branches can advise a customer on his or her success in obtaining a blue badge but badges are now centrally issued by Northgate and Payne Securities for the whole of the county.

The charge for a blue badge has also changed. A fee of £2.00 had been levied per application for a blue badge permit since 1983. This fee has now increased to £10.00 per blue badge application in Worcestershire. The presentation of the blue badges has also changed. A photograph of the blue badge holder will appear on the permit. This should enable Enforcement Officers to check that badges are being used legally. A hologram has also been added to each permit as this makes it more difficult to illegally replicate the badges. (Worcestershire County Council, 24th November 2011).

Civil Parking Enforcement

Civil parking enforcement is in place in a number of parts of Redditch Borough, including sections of Redditch town centre. The service is operated by Wychavon District Council on behalf of Redditch Borough Council in areas which are subject to a civil parking enforcement scheme. The police are not involved in managing civil parking enforcement schemes. Instead, the local authority is the responsible authority for enforcement. A number of Civil Parking Enforcement Officers are therefore employed to monitor compliance with the scheme.

Disabled Parking

Town Centre Pedestrian Area – Traffic Regulation Order

On 3rd February 2012 new Traffic Regulation Orders came into force in pedestrian areas of Redditch town centre. The order has been launched initially for a trial period of 18 months. This order prohibits the parking and loading of vehicles within the town centre pedestrian area except by blue badge permit holders.

These orders cover areas of Redditch town centre including: Alcester Street, Church Green East and Evesham Walk. The aim of these orders is to reduce the risk of conflict between pedestrians and vehicles. A specific criteria of vehicles are permitted to park or stop in areas that are subject to these orders including: emergency vehicles, refuse vehicles, bullion vehicles, postal vehicles, maintenance vehicles, cyclists and street traders with a valid permit.

The existing disabled parking bays in Church Green East have been retained. Blue badge holders parking in these spaces who display their permits are permitted to park in the area. However, if the spaces are full no drivers, including permit holders, are permitted to park in the vicinity. Drivers who park their vehicles in the area who do not park in designated disabled parking bays are being issued with penalty charge notices.

However, community transport vehicles, including Dial A Ride Buses and taxis which are transporting people with disabilities, are not permitted to park in these areas. Compliance with these arrangements are enforced as part of the Civil Parking Enforcement Scheme.

Disabled Parking

Alexandra Hospital – Disabled Parking Provision

In November 2011 Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust ruled that a charge would be levied for parking in disabled parking bays at the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch. Concessionary parking permits are available to relatives of long-stay patients or patients receiving regular treatment. Concessions are currently available for the following: the terminally ill; cardiac exercise; CCU; ITU; oncology; paediatrics; bereavement; the Renal Unit; and long stay. The hospital's Concessionary Car Parking Policy is currently being updated (Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, 2012).

A number of residents consulted during the review expressed concerns about the introduction of car parking charges for disabled parking spaces at the Alexandra Hospital. In particular, residents with disabilities were concerned that the policy would disproportionately impact on patients who were receiving regular care at the hospital as well as patients on low incomes because over time the parking charges could require significant financial investment from these patients.

The Councillors wrote a letter to the hospital outlining the concerns that had been reported to the group, particularly by the Redditch Access for Disabled Group. A reply was received from the Chief Executive of Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust in March 2012. The Trust acknowledged that parking charges for blue badge holders had been introduced in November 2011 which had brought the hospital in line with many other hospitals as part of a consistent approach to car parking charges for all patients. The letter stated that “this also ensures that we can continue to cover the cost of providing car parking in as fair a way as possible, as well as ensuring that any surplus income we receive will help to support front line care at a time of great financial pressure for our hospitals. Clearly, blue badge holders will continue to have prioritised car parking access and concessions are currently available for all patients and visitors who attend on a frequent basis.”

Following representations made by Worcestershire LINK (Local Involvement Network) the concession policy will be reviewed to ensure that those in greatest financial hardship receive some support towards their costs.

Disabled Parking

Consultation Feedback

Residents were consulted with regards to the availability of disabled parking spaces in Redditch town centre during the review. The feedback received from residents was relatively mixed. Whilst some residents were satisfied with the provision of disabled parking spaces in the town other residents had concerns about the issue.

Residents did suggest that additional disabled parking spaces needed to be made available in the town centre. In particular, additional parking spaces where extra room could be provided to board and exit an adapted vehicle using a wheelchair were considered to be limited in number by local residents. People with disabilities often reported that they struggled to travel short distances. For this reason, an increase in the provision of disabled parking spaces in areas close to the main retail units in the town centre was considered to be particularly desirable.

Concerns were expressed about the potential for use of blue badges to be abused, particularly by friends and relatives of permit holders. The new blue badge scheme, which will require photographs to be displayed by permit holders, may enable Civil Enforcement Officers to address this abuse in future years.

Car Parking Standards - Worcestershire

Disabled parking requirements are established at a county level by Worcestershire County Council's Transport Department. Current car parking standards are detailed in the Worcestershire Local Transport Plan 3 (Appendix H, Worcestershire Local Transport Plan 3). These standards were adopted in May 2006.

The Planning Department at Redditch Borough Council refers to these car parking standards when receiving planning applications. However, the Council's Planning Department cannot require for these standards to be imposed retrospectively on existing car parks. For this reason, the number of disabled parking spaces available in car parks that were established in the town prior to the introduction of these standards may not always comply with existing standards.

Access to taxis

Sources of Evidence The group considered a number of sources of evidence when reviewing access for people with disabilities to taxi services in Redditch. As part of this process interviews were conducted with the Licensing Manager and Senior Licensing Practitioner from the Worcestershire Regulatory Service. Interviews were also conducted with representatives from local taxi firms.

Adapted Vehicles There is currently no legal definition for a vehicle that has been adapted for the use of people with disabilities. However, car manufacturers do produce adapted vehicles, which are often designed to enable wheelchair access. Standard vehicles can also be converted for use as adapted vehicles.

Adapted vehicles are currently expensive to purchase. A second-hand adapted vehicle can cost a minimum of £8,000. Taxi firms have advised that in practice adapted vehicles cost between £15,000 – 20,000 to purchase.

Legal Context There are approximately 260 separate pieces of legislation relating to taxis, including both hackney carriages and private hire vehicles. As a consequence, the legislative framework for the licensing process is relatively complex. There is currently no legislative requirement for a particular number of licensed vehicles in a local fleet to consist of adapted vehicles. The Department for Transport has produced best practice guidance relating to provision of adapted vehicles which suggests that approximately 20 – 30 per cent of local taxi fleets should consist of adapted vehicles. However, there is no requirement to comply with these guidelines.

The Law Commission is currently in the process of reviewing taxi licensing legislation. The review is wide ranging as it focuses on all aspects of licensing. The Law Commission is due to report their findings in 2012 and may make recommendations to the government. The government will determine whether to draft legislation based on these recommendations. There is the possibility, though no guarantee, that this will include recommendations regarding access for passengers with disabilities to licensed vehicles.

Access to taxis

Taxi Services in Redditch

In November 2011 there were 372 licensed taxis operating in Redditch, consisting of 217 hackney carriage vehicles and 155 private hire vehicles. In the Borough 168 drivers are registered to drive hackney carriage vehicles, 141 drivers are registered to drive private hire vehicles and 85 drivers are registered to drive both types of vehicle*. In addition, there are a number of Public Service Vehicles (PSVs), which can seat eight or more passengers. Figures were not available at the time of writing regarding the number of PSV vehicles in operation in Redditch as the licences for PSVs are provided by the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA), rather than the local authority.

Licences are granted for both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles to operate until a vehicle is nine years old, though licences are not awarded to second hand vehicles that are more than six years old on the date of registration. New applications for licences must apply to vehicles that are accessible to wheelchairs. However, applications to renew existing licences do not currently require taxi drivers to purchase vehicles that are wheelchair accessible. Taxi firms can appeal to the Council's Licensing Committee to extend a licence for a further year once a vehicle reaches the age limit for a licence, though there is no guarantee that an extension to a licence will be granted.

Redditch Borough Council currently charges £258.65 to renew a licence for both a Hackney Carriage Vehicle and a Private Hire Vehicle whilst new applications for both types of vehicles cost £323.65. In addition, drivers must purchase a driving licence at a cost of £56.85 for both types of vehicles each year, although a combined driving license covering both types of vehicles can also be purchased for £83.00. Further charges are levied for the Council's licensing inspection process. As part of this process each licensed vehicle is required to pass two inspections as well as an MOT every year. (Redditch Borough Council website, 'fees', 2012).

* These figures were all provided on 10th November 2011. The number of licensed vehicles and drivers may have altered slightly since this date.

Access to taxis

Adapted Vehicles - Redditch

There are currently a small number of adapted vehicles licensed to operate as taxis in Redditch, including four hackney carriages and 10 private hire vehicles, representing approximately two per cent of the taxi fleet. This compares favourably with Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills and Wychavon districts respectively where approximately one per cent of the local fleets consist of adapted vehicles, though less favourably with Worcester City where 30 per cent of the fleet and Wyre Forest district where 50 per cent of the fleet consist of adapted vehicles.

The taxi firms which currently operate adapted vehicles in Redditch are well established service providers. Stickers promoting the suitability of service provision to passengers with disabilities are frequently displayed on the adapted vehicles. Services are also promoted through word of mouth, though business is also generated through regular contracts with schools, health services and residential homes.

Consultation Feedback

Residents were consulted about their experiences of using taxi services in Redditch and the quality of service provision to passengers with disabilities. Unfortunately, a number of respondents reported that they could not afford to use taxis to travel around the Borough. However, the majority of respondents who utilised taxi services in the town expressed positive views about the services that they received from local taxi drivers. (For further information about the feedback received during consultation please refer to pp 26-28).

Wyre Forest District Council

During the review Members were advised that Wyre Forest District Council had been particularly proactive in encouraging local taxi firms to increase the number of adapted vehicles in operation in the district. This increase in adapted vehicle provision followed completion of a detailed scrutiny review of taxi services by the Council which was completed in 2004.

In 2005 Wyre Forest District Council introduced a deregulation policy for hackney carriages. This policy required taxi firms to replace standard saloon vehicles with adapted vehicles once a vehicle

Access to taxis

Wyre Forest District Council

exceeded the age limit for licensed vehicles in the district. The aim of the policy was to ensure that 100 per cent of hackney carriages in the district would be adapted vehicles by 2013. The policy did not apply to private hire vehicles.

Following the introduction of the policy there had been a decline in the number of licensing applications received by the Council both for new hackney carriage vehicles and for new drivers. The deregulation policy had been challenged by a number of taxi representatives both informally, in the form of slow drive protests, and through legal proceedings in the courts. Wyre Forest District Council had successfully defended the deregulation policy, though at a significant financial cost to the Council.

Access to Buses

Sources of Evidence

The Councillors received evidence from representatives of First Group and Diamond Buses. Information was also provided by the Council's Equalities Policy Officer and Members considered evidence provided in written documentation.

Legal Context

The Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000 established legal standards regarding disabled access to public service vehicles which have the capacity to carry 22 passengers or more, including buses and coaches. As part of this process a minimum of a single wheelchair space should be provided at the front of a bus, including on the lower deck of a double decker bus or coach. Buses and coaches should also be fitted with a boarding lift or ramp, or should be provided with a portable boarding ramp which can be utilised when required.

The regulations did not, however, contain requirements in relation to electric mobility scooters. Guidance provided on the Department for Transport's website states that mobility scooters were not included in these provisions "...because scooters are outdoor vehicles intended for use as an alternative to public transport for short trips. They are generally less manoeuvrable than wheelchairs and cannot be used as a seat on a vehicle because of their instability and difficulty in providing appropriate restraint systems for both the scooter and the user." (DfT, Bus, Coach Accessibility FAQs, 2005).

Bus companies are also required to provide at least four priority seats at the front of the bus for the use of passengers with disabilities as well as elderly passenger. Stickers, using blue and white images, should be displayed next to these seats to advise customers about the priority seating arrangements.

Access to Buses

Legal Context

The Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000 did not require bus operators to make immediate adaptations to their vehicles. Instead, the regulations have been imposed in stages as detailed below:

- New buses and coaches weighing up to 7.5 tonnes have had to provide wheelchair access since 1st January 2005.
- All buses weighing up to 7.5 tonnes will need to be fully accessible by 1st January 2015.
- All single decker buses weighing 7.5 tonnes or more will need to be fully accessible by 1st January 2016.
- All double decker buses weighing 7.5 tonnes or more will need to be fully accessible by 1st January 2017.
- All coaches will need to be fully accessible by 1st January 2020.
(DfT, 2005).

The Public Service Vehicles (conduct of Drivers, Inspectors, Conductors and Passengers (Amendment) Regulations 2002 required all bus drivers to provide reasonable assistance to passengers with disabilities, including wheelchair users, from 1st October 2002. In particular, drivers were required to provide assistance with accessing and alighting from the vehicles.

Redditch Core Strategy

The Core Strategy for the Borough of Redditch is in the process of being prepared. This Core Strategy will form part of the Local Development Framework and will influence local planning policies within the Borough.

As part of the strategy consideration has been given to promoting sustainable transport. The Council has recognised that to encourage an increase in the use of sustainable methods of transport it needs to be accessible to all residents. The group is anticipating that their proposals to enhance access for people with disabilities to public transport would correspond with existing objectives in the Council's policy framework.

Access to Buses

Consultation Feedback

Residents were consulted with regards to the quality of services received by passengers with disabilities travelling on the local bus network. The feedback received from residents was relatively mixed. Some residents were satisfied with the services provided to disabled passengers. However, concerns were expressed by a number residents that it was not always possible for wheelchairs to access buses operating in Redditch. In addition, some residents commented that they did not always receive assistance from bus drivers and could experience discomfort, particularly when the vehicle started to move before the passenger had been seated. (For further information about the feedback received from residents please refer to pp 26-28).

Bus Services in Redditch

There are two leading providers of bus services in Redditch, First Group Plc and Diamond Buses. During the review evidence was considered in relation to the services that both companies provide to passengers with disabilities.

The group has been advised that all of Diamond Buses' vehicles operating in Redditch are fully compliant with the access requirements established in the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000. In March 2012 34 vehicles were based in Redditch of which 22 were fully compliant with the regulations and 3 were other low floor vehicles. There were also five older vehicles that were not compliant, though these served as school contract vehicles. As a consequence all of the company's vehicles dedicated to town services were fully accessible and only three of these vehicles were not fully DDA compliant.

Bus Drivers - Training

Bus drivers are required to undertake Certificate of Professional Competency (CPC) training every six years. As part of the CPC training process drivers employed by both Diamond Buses and First Group Plc are undertaking disability awareness training. The training at both companies involves elements of both theoretical and practical training, and includes a requirement for drivers to experience providing assistance to passengers with disabilities. This training should help to develop drivers' awareness of the needs of people with different types of disability travelling on public transport.

Access to Buses

Electric Scooters – Access to Buses

Diamond Buses aims to accommodate all types of wheelchair on their vehicles including powered electric mobility scooters. The company recently adopted a new policy in relation to wheelchair access to buses. This policy stipulates that a disabled passenger utilising any type of wheelchair, including an electric powered wheelchair, should be permitted to access a bus as long as there is sufficient space available. In these circumstances a passenger using a wheelchair should only be asked not to access a vehicle if there isn't sufficient space available for the wheelchair.

First Group Plc's policy is that wheelchair users have priority use of the dedicated space on accessible vehicles. In cases where this space is occupied by other passengers when a passenger using a wheelchair accesses a vehicle company drivers will ask for the space to be vacated for the wheelchair user.

The company has also signed up to the Confederation of Passenger Transport's (CPT's) code of practice for the use and acceptance of Mobility Scooters on low floor buses, which was introduced in 2011. This code of practice is designed to standardise procedures with regards to mobility scooters accessing public transport. Drivers have been provided with guidance on the code of practice and information is in the process of being disseminated for the consideration of the public. As part of the process every attempt is made to accommodate passengers in all types of wheelchair as long as sufficient space is available on the bus. In addition, all passengers utilising a mobility scooter need to secure a permit, following assessment by the bus operator, which demonstrates that the passenger has received training in how to board, alight and move safely within a vehicle.

Audio-Visual System

Diamond Buses in partnership with Centro, the West Midlands Integrated Transport authority, recently introduced an audio-visual signage system on 15 new buses. These buses only operate in parts of the West Midlands where both organisations are based, which does not include Redditch Borough.

Access to Buses

Audio Visual System

There is no legal requirement for bus operators to install an audio-visual system on vehicles. However, the system is useful as it provides assistance to passengers with sensory impairments, including passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing and customers who are blind or have a visual impairment.

Safe Journey Cards

First Group recently launched *Safe Journey Cards*. These cards can be displayed by a passenger in a bus pass wallet alongside a bus ticket or a concessionary pass. A variety of options are available to customers to describe the individual needs. For example a passenger who is deaf or hard of hearing can display a card which states “please speak slowly I am hard of hearing”. The cards, when displayed to the driver, help to explain the passenger’s disabilities and enable the driver to provide appropriate assistance.

The *Safe Journey Cards* can be easily accessed by downloading copies from First Group Plc’s website.

Worcestershire Transport Authority

Worcestershire Transport Department is the transport authority for the county. The Transport Department is currently working on several schemes, involving IT, which should benefit people with disabilities. In particular, the Worcestershire Transport Strategy Major Scheme Bid will involve a significant amount of work that will enable Real Time Information (RTI), which will be fully RNIB enabled, to be available on key passenger transport routes in Worcester. The department is planning to extend provision of RTI to vehicles operating in other parts of the county in due course.

Consultation

Approach to Consultation

The group attempted to consult widely with local residents, particularly residents with disabilities, during the review. The information provided by residents through consultation was addressed further during interviews with expert witnesses and in the group's final recommendations.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was produced by the Councillors to provide local residents with an opportunity to contribute to the review. The questionnaire focused on the accessibility of Redditch town centre for people with disabilities, particularly in relation to bus and taxi service provision and disabled parking spaces. (A copy of the questionnaire template can be accessed at Appendix C and a copy of the responses received to the questionnaire at Appendix D).

The questionnaire was distributed to a number of venues throughout the Borough, including Redditch Town Hall, Batchley, Winyates and Woodrow One Stop Shops and the Palace Theatre. Copies were also provided to customers of the Redditch Shopmobility Service and the Dial A Ride community transport service. In addition, copies of the questionnaire were distributed to residents at a meeting of the Redditch Access for Disabled Group and the Redditch branch of the University of the Third Age. Residents were advised of the opportunity to complete copies of this questionnaire on the Council's website and in editions of the *Redditch Advertiser* on 30th November 2011 and the *Redditch Standard* on 2nd December 2011.

Unfortunately only 32 completed copies of the group's questionnaire were received from local residents. The group recognises that this number of responses cannot be viewed as representative of the experiences of all residents with disabilities. However, the Councillors concluded that the questionnaire responses that were received represented a useful sample of opinion from residents with disabilities.

Redditch Access for Disabled Group

The Councillors attended a meeting of the Redditch Access for Disabled Group in December 2011. Unfortunately only four members of the access group attended the meeting. However, a number of issues were raised on the subject of access to Redditch.

Consultation

Redditch Older Peoples' Forum

The Redditch Older Peoples' Forum were also consulted during a meeting at the Ecumenical Centre in January 2012. The 25 members of the forum similarly commented on the particular needs of people with disabilities and elderly residents in order to access the town centre.

Feedback – Common Trends

There were some common trends in the feedback provided by residents. This included the following points:

- The majority of residents consulted travelled by car or bus to access Redditch town centre.
- Overall respondents suggested that the difficulties they encountered attempting to access Redditch town centre were average when compared to other parts of the country.
- Bus drivers did not consistently provide assistance to passengers with disabilities, and did not always allow passengers to sit before the vehicle started to move.
- Some residents struggled to access bus stops due to mobility impairments.
- Many residents were concerned about changes to bus service provision and bus timetables
- Taxi drivers were praised for providing assistance to passengers with disabilities.
- Limited availability of suitable collection and delivery points was likely to deter people with disabilities from attempting to access Redditch town centre.
- There were a number of concerns about the condition of the pavements and provision of dropped kerbs in the town centre which were not always considered to be suitable for wheelchairs and mobility scooters.
- Concerns were expressed about the accessibility of local shops to people with disabilities. The majority of completed questionnaires reported that disabled parking provision was average when compared to other parts of the country.
- However, further provision of free disabled parking spaces was requested for local residents as many residents on low incomes struggled to pay parking fees.
- An increase in provision of disabled parking spaces that were large enough to accommodate adapted vehicles and powered wheelchairs was requested for the town centre.

Consultation

Feedback – Common Trends (cont)

- Additional enforcement action was requested to deter abusive use of blue badges by relatives and friends of blue badge holders.
- A number of respondents were concerned about the introduction of a charge for disabled parking at the Alexandra Hospital.
- The former covered market area was identified as a suitable location for additional disabled parking spaces in the town centre.
- Residents expressed concerns about the safety of elderly and disabled pedestrians in the town centre, particularly on Church Green East and Church Green West.
- Extra seating in the town centre and Kingfisher Shopping Centre was requested by a number of respondents, for the use of elderly residents and people with disabilities.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 We recommend that a user friendly version of the map (detailed in Appendix B) demonstrating the location of disabled parking spaces and Shopmobility in Redditch town centre should be produced and promoted on the Council's website, on the Redditch Matters e-magazine and on the Palace Theatre's website and should be promoted to local businesses to use.

At the start of the review Members requested information about the availability of parking spaces for people with disabilities in the town centre. Whilst it was recognised that disabled parking spaces were provided in a variety of locations in the town there was no map at the time demonstrating where all of these spaces were located. To assist the Councillors with their enquiries a map highlighting the location of all disabled parking spaces in the town centre, was produced by Officers (Appendix B, p _).

This map was produced using technical IT systems and is incredibly detailed. The group does not believe that the map in this form is particularly user friendly. However, the Councillors have been assured that it should be relatively easy to produce a copy of this report in a simplified form and at a negligible financial cost to the Council.

The group have also been advised that it should be possible to produce this map in alternative formats, such as large print or translated into another language, if required. Whilst this process would require financial expenditure the Council currently allocates a budget to producing documentation in alternative formats and the group has been advised that there was an under spend in this budget in 2010/11.

The group believes that a map of disabled parking provision in the town would be a useful tool for both residents and visitors with disabilities. A link to the map could be provided on the Equality and Diversity pages on the Council's website, though the group would be keen to provide a prominent

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 link to the map from the website's homepage. The Councillors also believe that this map should feature in publications, such as the online Redditch Matters e-magazine, to help promote parking provision for people with disabilities in the town.

The Councillors recognise that people with disabilities make an active contribution to the local economy through work and participation in public life. Local businesses can also benefit from the custom of visitors with disabilities. For these reasons the map could be a useful resource for local businesses, particularly as a promotional tool to potential customers. The group therefore believes that copies of this map should also be made available for the use of local businesses as and when required.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1a We recommend that the contents of this map should be reviewed every twelve months to ensure that the information remains accurate.

During the second stage of the review some concerns were expressed about the accuracy of the map that had been produced to illustrate the location of disabled parking bays in Redditch town centre. Whilst these concerns proved to be groundless Members agreed that it was important to ensure that the content of the map remained up to date. This would ensure that customers utilising the map could base their assessments of their parking options on accurate information.

An annual review of the contents of the map would require a limited amount of financial investment. In particular, the Council would need to invest in Officer time to complete the work. However, the group believes that this investment would be justified in order to ensure that members of the public are not misinformed and would demonstrate that the Council is a responsible authority.

Recommendations

Recommendation 2 We recommend that Redditch Borough Council should work with the Redditch Town Centre Partnership, Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department and the Kingfisher Shopping Centre to introduce collection and delivery points in the town centre that could be used by vehicles transporting people with disabilities.

The group was informed about a number of complaints with regard to access for people with disabilities to Redditch town centre during the review. A significant proportion of these complaints related to the provision of suitable delivery and collection points for vehicles transporting people with disabilities.

A number of community transport services, including Dial A Ride, as well as local taxi firms operate minibuses to transport passengers with disabilities to various locations across the Borough. The existing provision of collection and delivery points is not considered to be ideal, particularly for customers with disabilities who struggle to travel short distances.

The Dial A Ride buses and adapted taxis are not permitted to stop in designated disabled parking bays unless they are displaying a blue badge. This causes particular difficulties when arranging suitable collection points for people with disabilities as the vehicle is unlikely to have access to a blue badge to display. In addition, the group has been advised though that passengers with disabilities do not always obtain blue badges because they are unable to drive or rarely travel and in these circumstances delivery arrangements can also be problematic.

Dial A Ride vehicles are also not permitted to stop in pedestrianised areas that are subject to a parking order in Redditch town centre. Drivers operating Dial A Ride vehicles have been cautioned by Traffic Wardens for stopping for short periods in disabled parking bays located in Church Green East. The group has been advised that it would not be possible at this stage to extend the category of vehicles that are eligible to stop in these areas to include Dial A Ride vehicles.

Recommendations

Recommendation 2 The limited provision of suitable delivery and collection points has implications for the ability of people with disabilities to access Redditch. In these circumstances people with disabilities can be deterred from travelling to the town centre and may be prevented from having an opportunity to fully participate in public life. Furthermore, by restricting access to the town centre in this manner current arrangements may be impacting negatively on the local economy as local retail outlets will not be benefiting from potential custom from people with disabilities.

The group believe that there are a number of suitable locations within the town centre which could be utilised as additional collection and delivery points. To an extent these have been addressed in recommendations 1, in relation to the former covered market area, and 11, in relation to Apollo 2000. However, the Councillors are encouraging relevant partner agencies to identify further locations that could be used for this purpose.

In particular, Members are keen to ensure that the Kingfisher Shopping Centre works with partner organisations to identify a suitable collection and delivery point that could be utilised by customers for the Apollo cinema. During the review complaints were received that there were no suitable locations for vehicles to collect and deliver customers visiting the cinema. The parking spaces provided in the multi-storey car parks at the centre were not considered to be suitable for this purpose as the vehicles were stopping temporarily. The group therefore believes that suitable collection and delivery points for the cinema should be considered further.

The Redditch Town Centre Partnership and Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department have been consulted regarding these proposals. Following consultation with representatives of the Highways Department the potential for extra delivery and collections points to be introduced in pedestrianised parts of the town centre was rejected. However, the group has been advised that further consideration could be given to introducing collection and delivery points on roads adjoining Alcester Street, Church Green East and Evesham Walk where requested.

Recommendations

Recommendation 3 We recommend that taxi companies should be offered licences to operate adapted vehicles for a longer period of time than standard vehicles to incentivise taxi firms to increase the number of adapted vehicles in their fleets. The vehicles should be permitted to operate for these lengthier periods of time subject to passing the three inspection tests and the MOT that the Council's licensing regime requires for each vehicle.

The group are concerned about the relatively low number of adapted vehicles in the taxi fleets operating in Redditch and believe that action needs to be taken to increase provision to meet the needs of residents with disabilities. The number of adapted vehicles may gradually increase as new drivers apply for licences for new vehicles. However, this is likely to be a relatively slow process. Consequently the Councillors believe that incentives should be provided to encourage taxi firms to increase the number of adapted vehicles in local fleets.

A key incentive that the group believes would encourage an increase in the number of adapted vehicles would be to offer licences for an extended period of time for adapted vehicles. In this context, adapted vehicles would be awarded licences to operate for a number of years longer than standard vehicles.

The group has not specified the exact length that adapted vehicles should be licensed to operate. The Councillors believe that this should be determined by professional licensing practitioners and the Council's Licensing Committee as well through consultation with taxi companies. The group would urge, though, consideration of a significant difference in the age range requirements to ensure that the licensing arrangement represents a viable incentive. A lengthier licence could enable a taxi company to justify the significant expenditure required to invest in an adapted vehicle, which costs more than a standard vehicle as the costs involved in purchasing the vehicle would be offset by the additional trade that could be attracted over an extended period of time.

Recommendations

Recommendation 3 The group is aware that car manufacturers are increasingly introducing features into the design of new vehicles that enhance the safety of passengers. Older adapted vehicles licensed to operate in the Borough would not necessarily benefit from these advances. However, the group believes that the safety of all vehicles and passengers within those vehicles, including adapted vehicles, should be ascertained through the Council's inspection regime. The group would expect the licence for any vehicle, including an adapted vehicle, to be withdrawn if a vehicle failed to pass any of the tests or the MOT that each vehicle is required to pass as part of the licensing inspection process in Redditch.

Car manufacturers are also increasingly introducing features that are designed to reduce carbon emissions from vehicles. Older adapted vehicles licensed to operate in Redditch would not benefit from these design elements. However, the group does not believe that the policy would have a negative impact on climate change. Taxi companies consulted by the group reported that they received fewer bookings from customers with disabilities than from customers who were not disabled. As a consequence, the standard mileage for adapted vehicles was lower than for standard vehicles. In this context the group believes that the impact of this policy on carbon emissions would be negligible.

The actions proposed in this recommendation would constitute a change to licensing policy in the Borough. Any policy changes within the licensing regime require consultation to be undertaken over a twelve week period. All interested parties would need to be consulted during this period including: taxi drivers, vehicle owners, taxi operators, West Mercia Police and groups representing people with disabilities. All consultation processes require some financial expenditure from the local authority, though the group believes that this investment would be justifiable as it could lead to an increase in the number of adapted vehicles available for the use of people with disabilities.

Recommendations

Recommendation 4

We recommend that taxi drivers should be offered disability awareness training, which would include information about manually assisting people with disabilities, by Redditch Borough Council.

The Councillors discovered during the review that Redditch Borough Council does not currently provide training to taxi drivers on the subject of disability awareness. A number of taxi companies based in Redditch have confirmed that they do provide training to their employees on the subject of disability awareness. However, the content of this training is determined by the taxi firm and it is likely that there will be varying standards and levels of disability awareness through the sector. Furthermore, representatives of local taxi companies have confirmed that there are some drivers operating adapted vehicles within the Borough who do not understand the specific needs of passengers with disabilities or how to securely fasten equipment used by people with disabilities such as wheelchairs.

Trained drivers will recognise that passengers with disabilities, particularly mobility impairments, often require assistance with both access and egress from a vehicle. In cases where a passenger is travelling in a wheelchair or mobility scooter the wheelchair needs to be securely locked into position which can be achieved where the breaks are applied. Sometimes, passengers with disabilities also require assistance from the driver when applying their seatbelts. Drivers need to be prepared to provide a smooth drive, may need to drive more slowly than usual and might need to consider routes that avoid road features such as speed bumps as all of these elements impact on the comfort of a wheelchair user when travelling in a vehicle.

Passengers with other forms of disability also require particular assistance. Vehicles coated in bright colours, particularly yellow vehicles, are more likely to be recognised by visually impaired passengers, who may also require space for the use of a guide dog. In addition, instructions provided in a variety of formats, including Braille or clear print, can help passengers with sensory impairments and learning difficulties.

Recommendations

Recommendation 4 Disability awareness training is provided to licensed drivers by other local authorities in the country. In Worcestershire this training can be provided by local colleges as well as the Driver Safety Operative at Worcestershire County Council, which already undertakes driving standards tests on behalf of the Council. There are also a number of external training providers, such as the Vassall Centre Trust, which can provide disability awareness training.

Disability awareness training for taxi drivers costs approximately £40.00 per person at the majority of local authorities where training is currently provided, though costs are likely to vary according to the fees charged by the training provider. A number of local authorities provide disability awareness training to taxi drivers free of charge, though the group has been advised that the majority of local authorities charge participants. Any fees charged for this training are used to cover the costs involved in delivering the training rather than to generate a profit. The group believes that if disability awareness training is made available to taxi drivers operating in Redditch the Council should not have to cover the costs for the training. However, the Councillors recognise that some taxi companies would struggle to pay for all drivers to participate in this training. For this reason, the group is not proposing that the training should be mandatory for licensed drivers.

The Councillors believe that taxi firms and drivers would benefit from participating in disability awareness training provided by the Council. The drivers would receive standard guidance on the particular needs of people with different types of disabilities. Participation in this training could also have a positive impact on the reputation of local taxi firms and help to increase business for those firms. The Councillors believe that drivers participating in this training should be provided with a qualification or certificate that proves they have been trained to achieve certain standards in service delivery to customers with disabilities.

Redditch Borough Council would also benefit from introducing disability awareness training for local taxi drivers. An initiative of this sort would positively contribute to and support the local authority's

Recommendations

Recommendation 4 general equalities duties, detailed in the Equality Act 2010. In particular, this training would contribute to fostering good relations between people with disabilities and people who are not disabled.

The provision of disability awareness training by Redditch Borough Council would constitute a change to local policy. Any changes to licensing policies are subject to consultation over a twelve week period. Local taxi drivers, vehicle owners, taxi firms and other interested parties, including the West Mercia Police and groups representing people with disabilities would need to be consulted as part of this process.

Recommendations

Recommendation 5 We recommend that Worcestershire County Council's Transport Department should work with local bus operators to apply for any future Better Buses Area Funding from the Department for Transport to finance the installation of audio-visual equipment on buses operating in Redditch Borough

The group was impressed by the potential of the audio-visual system, which had been installed on 15 of Diamond Buses vehicles in 2011, to assist passengers with sensory impairments. The audio-visual system was relatively expensive, however, and Diamond Buses has only been able to introduce the system on vehicles in areas jointly served by the company and their partners in this scheme, Centro. Unfortunately, this area does not include Redditch.

Representatives from Diamond Buses advised members of the group that the company would struggle to invest in an audio-visual system for the remaining fleet. However, it was possible that the company would be able to expand provision of the service if additional partners could be identified to share the financial costs and risks involved in installing and operating the system.

Worcestershire County Council's Transport Department has been consulted about the potential for support to be provided by the department to bus companies to enable service operators to install an audio-visual system on vehicles operating in the Borough. The group has been advised that due to current local government financial constraints additional sources of funding would be required to enable the county transport authority to provide the support suggested. There is the potential that this additional source of funding could be provided in future if the Department for Transport promotes an additional round of Better Buses Area Fund. Under these circumstances the group has been informed by representatives of Worcestershire Transport Department that the group's recommendations would be considered as one of the potential options for the authority's bid.

Recommendations

Recommendation 5

Diamond Buses and First Group have both been consulted about the potential for support to be provided to enable the companies to install an audio-visual system to be installed on vehicles operating in Redditch Borough. Members believe that local bus operators should be consulted about any opportunities that might arise in future to support the provision of audio-visual systems on buses operating in Redditch Borough.

Recommendations

Recommendation 6 We recommend that a disability awareness session should be delivered as part of the Member Development Programme at Redditch Borough Council.

During the course of the review the group gathered a lot of information about the difficulties encountered by people with disabilities in their daily lives. As a consequence the Councillors' awareness of the issues impacting on people with different disabilities, as well as the service needs of people with disabilities, was greatly enhanced.

The members of the group believe that other Councillors would similarly benefit from participating in a process that would extend their knowledge of the needs of residents with disabilities. Councillors need to have an understanding of potential customers in order to assist and serve those customers when required. In particular, Councillors who are aware of the specific needs of residents with disabilities would be in a better position to assist those residents with constituency enquiries as well as to make a considered assessment of the implications of any proposed changes to service delivery for residents with disabilities.

In recent months a training session was delivered to Councillors, which addressed each of the six protected characteristics detailed in the Equality Act 2010, including disabilities (Please see p 8 for information about the protected characteristics). A further session, focusing on the Equality Act 2010, is due to be delivered in 2013. The group believes that this session will be important as it will enable local Councillors to learn about the local authority's legal duties in relation to equalities. However, the group believes a separate session focusing on disability awareness and access issues should also be provided as part of the Member Development programme due to the greater number of practical barriers that impact on residents with disabilities.

Training is delivered to elected Councillors in Redditch in a variety of ways. This can include training delivered by Officers employed by the Council, training delivered by specialist training

Recommendations

Recommendation 6 providers and training provided at external locations. The group has developed no preferences with regard to the most appropriate training provider for a session focusing on disability awareness. However, to maximise the potential for a significant number of Councillors to attend this training session the group believes that the disability awareness session should be provided at Redditch Town Hall.

Councillor training sessions often require a small amount of financial expenditure. At Redditch Borough Council in 2011/12 a budget of approximately £13,000 was allocated to Member development and support. The budget is used to support all of the twenty-nine elected Members of the local authority, and covers a variety of areas including training for the Councillors. Whilst exact figures cannot be provided at this stage for the costs involved in delivering training on disability awareness, as this would be subject to the charges levied by the training provider, the group believes that the session could be funded using a small portion of this budget.

Recommendations

Recommendation 7 We recommend that ward Members should be made aware that they can use their knowledge of the local community to assess the condition of the pavements and dropped kerbs located in their wards and report their findings for the consideration of Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department and Redditch Borough Council's Environmental Services.

One of the key areas of concern raised by residents during consultation related to the condition of the pavements and provision of dropped kerbs in the Borough. Uneven pavements were considered to be a safety hazard for people with disabilities, particularly mobility and visual impairments, as well as elderly residents. Residents using wheelchairs and mobility scooters reported that dropped kerbs were not always provided in appropriate locations which could create obstacles when residents were attempting to travel around the town or to access public transport.

The group believes that local ward councillors are in an ideal position to assess the condition of the pavements and provision of dropped kerbs on behalf of their constituents. Councillors frequently visit the wards they represent when participating in estate walkabouts, visiting constituents or canvassing during the election period. The group believes that Councillors could easily record any uneven paving or limited provision of dropped kerbs observed during these visits as well as the location of these paving problems and report their findings for the consideration of Council Officers. By undertaking this task the Councillors would also remove the need for additional Officer resources to be allocated the work at a time when local authority resources are limited.

The group is aware that this task already comes within the remit of local Councillors. However, the group believes many Councillors are not aware that they have the authority to undertake this task and for this reason they believe that the process should be highlighted for all Councillors' consideration. The group does not, though, believe that all Councillors should be required to fulfil this role. Ironically, members of the scrutiny group who utilise mobility scooters reported that they

Recommendations

Recommendation 7 would struggle to travel around every estate in their wards as they could not rely on adequate provision of dropped kerbs. Consequently, the group is proposing that Councillors should be urged to assume this responsibility wherever possible.

Records of uneven pavements and problems with the provision of dropped kerbs could in the first instance be reported to Officers in Redditch Borough Council's Environmental Services. These Officers would be able to identify whether the problems identified by the Councillors related to adopted public highways, which are the responsibility of Worcestershire County Council, or unadopted highways, which can be maintained by the Borough Council.

Worcestershire County Council's Sustainable Transport Team currently investigates all requests regarding access, including dropped kerb access. Requests can be reported by any member of the public via the Worcestershire Hub and are scored and given a priority ranking. The instances identified as top priorities will be addressed using the available budget.

Recommendations

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Council's Planning Department should consider arranging for funding from Section 106 agreements to be allocated to the installation of tactile signage in the town centre for the use of people with sensory impairments.

The group recognises that people with sensory impairments, especially people who are visually impaired, have particular requirements in relation to negotiating a location. Tactile signage can help blind and visually impaired people to access a venue in a relatively straight forward manner. Whilst the group recognises that many people with a visual impairment may not be able to read Braille the group does believe that Braille directional signs would be helpful to a large proportion of visually impaired residents and visitors to the town.

The group believes that tactile signage should be introduced as part of the ongoing redevelopment of Redditch town centre. The introduction of this signage would support the Council's general equality duty to improve access and the ability of people with disabilities to participate in society. The Councillors recognise that it might be difficult to finance the introduction of tactile signage using existing budgets. However, the group believes that tactile signage could be funded using monies generated through Section 106 agreements.

Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allowed local Planning Departments to enter into legally binding agreements with landowners as part of the process for granting planning permission for new developments. The agreements ensure that developments are acceptable from a planning perspective and the monies generated through these agreements can be used to support services and infrastructure, such as local highways and recreational facilities.

In Redditch the terms and conditions of Section 106 agreements are assessed on a case by case basis. Attempts are made to ensure that all of the terms agreed relate fairly in scale and kind to the proposed development. Due to requirements for the distribution of section 106 monies funding for the installation of tactile signage in the town centre would primarily be derived from agreements relating to developments in and around the town centre.

Recommendations

Recommendation

9

We recommend that Redditch Town Centre Partnership work with the Kingfisher Shopping Centre to introduce additional seating in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, involving an investigation of the ergonomics of the seating provided.

One of the key barriers to participation in public life for people with disabilities that was identified by residents was the limited provision of seating in the town centre. Residents reported that people with disabilities, as well as elderly residents, needed to access seating frequently when visiting the town centre. The Kingfisher Shopping Centre, as the main retail hub in Redditch town centre, was identified as a particular venue where additional seating was required to meet the needs of elderly and disabled customers.

Currently a number of seats are available for customers to use in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre. These seats are largely available in Worcester Square or in the various cafes and restaurants situated in the centre. Members believe, however, that it should be possible to introduce additional seating in the centre. Indeed, relatively recently seats were installed close to the Waterstones unit in the centre.

Furthermore, Members believe that the type of seating that is provided could be reviewed. Currently, the seats in the shopping centre have a relatively hard surface. Members are aware that comfortable seating, such as sofa chairs, are available for customers to use at other shopping centres in the country. Under these circumstances, the group is suggesting that the ergonomics of the design of the seats should be considered as part of any arrangement to introduce additional seating in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre.

The group believes that the financial costs involved in investing in new seating would be justified. These financial costs would be offset by the increased custom that may be generated by customers with disabilities who, having accessed the seating, might be more likely to remain in the centre for lengthier periods of time.

Recommendations

- Recommendation 9** Representatives of the Kingfisher Shopping Centre have been consulted about this proposal. The centre is keen to meet the needs of all customers visiting the centre, including elderly and disabled customers. However, the appropriate locations for any additional seating would need to be considered to minimise health and safety risks. Members did not believe that it was appropriate for the group to identify the locations where additional seating should be provided. However, as the Kingfisher Shopping Centre is a member of the Redditch Town Centre Partnership the group believes that the centre could work with partner organisations to identify suitable locations for any additional seating as part of the redevelopment of the town centre.

Recommendations

Recommendation 10a

We recommend that Officers undertake further work into the following areas that should be reported for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee at a later date:

a) a review of the potential to install a canopy over the ramp access to Shopmobility.

During the course of the group's visit to Shopmobility, in July 2012, Members utilised the ramp located beside Car Park 2 to access Shopmobility. At the end of the visit the group welcomed the excellent service provided by both Dial a Ride and Shopmobility staff to customers. Concerns were expressed, however, about the current design of the ramp. At present there is no cover on the ramp, as illustrated in figures 2 and 3, p 62. Whilst the group understands that the ramp receives a priority clearance service during periods of inclement weather Members are concerned that the lack of a cover could create hazards for customers. In particular, Members have concluded that during periods of persistently bad weather the current lack of a cover for the ramp represents a potential health and safety hazard for customers as well as staff attempting to deliver scooters to customers.

To address this problem the group believes that the Council should provide a cover, such as a canopy, for the ramp. Members recognise that this would require a detailed investigation of the most appropriate form of cover, the materials required and the financial costs involved. Questions have also been raised during the course of the review regarding ownership of the land where the ramp is situated. These questions would need to be addressed as part of any review of the issue.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain all the information needed to enable Members to make an accurate assessment of the feasibility of this proposal by the end of their review. Members believe, however, that a further review of this issue is justified as it will enable the Council to address an issue that could impact on the delivery of a valuable service to local residents.

Recommendations

Recommendation 10a



Figure 2: Dial a Ride customers access Shopmobility using a ramp located immediately beside the vehicle stopping point. The ramp uses an “anti-slip” surface which is designed to minimise the risk of customer falls.

Figure 3: Customers in wheelchairs can be assisted down the ramp. Similar assistance can be provided to pedestrians on foot. The ramp is cleaned as a priority during periods of inclement weather and Shopmobility staff can arrange to bring a scooter to the top of the ramp on request. There is currently, however, no permanent cover over the ramp.



Recommendations

Recommendation 10b

We recommend that Officers undertake further work into the following areas that should be reported for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee at a later date:

- b) a joint review in partnership with Apollo 2000 of the potential for the Council to undertake landscaping work in the company's car park in return for using the car park as a collection and delivery point for Dial A Ride vehicles**

During the course of the review Members discussed a number of locations in the town centre which could potentially be utilised as collection and delivery points for passengers with disabilities by Dial A Ride vehicles. One of the key locations identified by the group was the car park owned by the company, Apollo 2000. Apollo 2000 is ideally situated close to Redditch Town Hall, the Palace Theatre, Redditch Magistrates Court and Redditch Police Station as well as close to a number of public houses and restaurants. The company's car park is situated on flat ground, and therefore is an appropriate location to deliver passengers who utilise wheelchairs.

Representatives of Apollo 2000 have been consulted regarding the potential for the company's car park to be utilised as a collection and delivery point by Dial A Ride vehicles. At the date of writing an official response from the company's head quarters was not available. However, whilst no agreements have been reached at this stage representatives of the Redditch branch of the company indicated that the company would be willing to enter into discussions with Redditch Borough Council about the issue.

In return for this arrangement questions have been raised by the company about whether the Council would be willing to undertake landscaping works in the Apollo 2000 car park. Landscaping works need to be undertaken in the area as and when required to ensure that the car park remains in an appropriate condition for both customers and staff. Receipt of landscaping services from the Council would therefore represent useful assistance to the company.

Recommendations

Recommendation 10b

Relevant Officers from the Council's landscaping team have been consulted about the potential for the local authority to provide landscaping works in the car park. Officers have indicated that consideration would need to be given to how this arrangement could be incorporated into existing work schedules and potential insurance liability arrangements would need to be clarified. The Council would also need to discuss and agree a programme of works to ensure that both parties had a mutual understanding of the service that would need to be provided.

The group believes that the potential to work with Apollo 2000 on this matter should be explored further. However, Members recognise that further work, including official consultation with representatives of Apollo 2000, is required. Under these circumstances the group is suggesting that a further review, involving relevant Council Officers, should be undertaken to explore this option in more detail.

Recommendations

Recommendation 10c We recommend that Officers undertake further work into the following areas that should be reported for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee at a later date:

- c) a joint review with the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, concerning the potential activation of the RNIB React system in the centre.

During the review the group was advised that the RNIB React signage system had been included in the original design for the Kingfisher Shopping Centre. However, the system has never been activated in the centre.

The RNIB React signage system was developed by the RNIB to provide blind and visually impaired people with a talking direction system. To use this system the individual needs to obtain a fob which can trigger verbal instructions from speaker systems located at venues where the RNIB React system has been installed. The system can also be programmed to provide detailed real-time information for the consideration of the individual.

Representatives of the Kingfisher Shopping Centre have been consulted about the potential for the RNIB React system to be activated. The group has been advised that there is general appreciation of the value of the system, particularly to customers who are blind or have a visual impairment. However, difficulties have been identified with regard to the activation of the system, particularly in relation to maintenance requirements. Furthermore, it has been suggested that, in keeping with standard practice across the country, consideration should be given to the local authority managing the system on behalf of the shopping centre.

The group recognises that the issues identified during consultation require further investigation. Members are therefore suggesting the relevant Council Officers should work with representatives

Recommendations

Recommendation 10c

of the Kingfisher Shopping Centre to address the practical and financial implications of activating the system.

Members believe that if the RNIB React system is activated this process should be acknowledged through an official ceremony. To help raise the profile of the event the group is suggesting that the Mayor of Redditch and other civic dignitaries should attend this ceremony to demonstrate their support for the action. At the time of writing, however, the date when the system was due to become operational remained to be confirmed.

Recommendations

Recommendation

10 d

We recommend that Officers undertake further work into the following areas that should be reported for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee at a later date:

- d) a review of the implications of introducing disabled parking spaces and a Dial a Ride collection and delivery point in the former covered market area, as detailed in Appendix E.

The provision of parking spaces to people with disabilities was a subject that interested many of the residents consulted during the review as the majority accessed Redditch town centre by car. Throughout the review residents reported that more parking spaces needed to be provided in the town centre free of charge for the use of people with disabilities. The site of the former covered market area, which is located beside the Kingfisher Shopping Centre in Redditch town centre, was consistently identified as a suitable location to introduce these parking spaces.

The former covered market area is a section of land that is owned by Redditch Borough Council. The site has not been used for the market for some time. Attempts have been made in recent years to utilise the space for constructive purposes, though no permanent usage has been established. The site is currently being used as a temporary base for market traders to park their vehicles whilst work is undertaken to enhance the security of the traders' long-term parking facilities. The area is also utilised to provide pedestrian access to the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, primarily through Fountain's Passage.

The *Borough of Redditch Local Plan 3* has designated the former covered market area as a site that is officially located within the town centre and within what is referred to as the Retail Core, or the primary retail area in the town. All areas that are designated as part of the Retail Core are protected by a local planning policy, *Policy E (TCR).5 Retail Core*. This policy discourages use of Retail Core areas for non-retail uses.

Recommendations

Recommendation 10 d

There are also plans to redevelop large parts of Redditch town centre over the next few years, as detailed in the *Redditch Town Centre Strategy*. As part of this process the former covered market area has been identified as an appropriate location for a mixed use development, which would entail a significant element of retail expansion.

However, due to the current difficult economic climate, there were concerns within the group that any redevelopment works would not take place for a number of years until the local economy starts to show signs of recovery. The group concurred that it was important to ensure that constructive use was made of the former covered market area in the intervening period. The introduction of disabled parking spaces in the former covered market area could also help to increase footfall in the area and, thereby have a positive impact on the local economy. The Council would learn about the viability of a disabled parking scheme in the area from a trial period, which could help Officers and Councillors to assess the potential to maintain parking provision in the area in the long-term if it does not prove possible to redevelop the area.

There would be financial implications involved in introducing disabled parking spaces in the former covered market area for a trial period. Officers have advised that approximately £14,000 would need to be allocated to the project. This would be invested in providing adequate signage, road markings and parking bay markings. The costs would also cover works to the existing steel columns that support the roof structure, which Officers have advised would need to be reinforced to a height of 1.2 metres from ground level. Administration costs and the cost of Officers' time to complete the works could increase the financial costs involved in delivering these works further. To ensure that ineligible drivers do not park in the spaces consideration should also be given as to whether to issue an order for the Civil Parking Enforcement Scheme to apply in the area. If Fountain's Passage was to be closed temporarily additional costs would be incurred by the Council in order to secure the area safely.

Recommendations

Recommendation 10 d

The group did consider the possibility of charging for the use of the disabled parking spaces during the trial period. Funding accrued from parking charges could help to finance some of the initial start up costs. In addition, any funds generated through a charging scheme could contribute to the maintenance costs as well as the costs of extending the civil enforcement programme to the area during the trial period. However, the group concluded that a charge would need to be set at a relatively high level to cover these costs for the trial period. There were concerns that this arrangement would also reduce the accessibility of the disabled parking spaces to people on low incomes. For these reasons the group decided not to propose that use of these disabled parking spaces be subject to a parking fee.

A plan of the potential layout for a disabled parking scheme in the former covered market area has been produced for Members' consideration (Appendix E, p -). This plan indicates that 12 disabled parking bays could be introduced on the site of the former covered market area, together with a bus stop that could be utilised by Dial A Ride vehicles to collect and deliver passengers. Vehicular access to the parking spaces would be provided via the mini roundabout and rear service access road located to the west of Redditch Town Hall. Egress would be through a separate route through the narrow access located to the side of multi-storey Car Park 2, which leads back on to the mini roundabout.

As part of the plans, outlined in Appendix E, a collection and delivery point that could be used by Dial a Ride vehicles could also be introduced at the former covered market area. The former covered market area is located close to one of the entrances to the Kingfisher Shopping Centre as well as to the Post Office and Library. Passengers with disabilities would have immediate access to a lift which could be used to enter the centre. The ground is relatively flat so would be suitable for the use of the equipment installed on adapted vehicles and Dial A Ride Buses.

Customers for the Shopmobility service would also be able to access scooters on the site of the

Recommendations

Recommendation 10 d

former covered market area. Currently, the Shopmobility service can arrange for scooters to be delivered to a variety of locations, including the former covered market area, subject to a request having been received from the customer in advance. The group are contending that if this recommendation is approved the option to book delivery of a scooter should be promoted to customers to ensure that people with disabilities parking in the former covered market area can access scooters when required.

Concerns have been raised that the introduction of a trial disabled parking scheme and collection and delivery point for Dial a Ride vehicles in the area would raise expectations amongst residents that disabled parking provision might become a more permanent arrangement. However, the group believes that this risk of misunderstanding could be minimised if appropriate signage is utilised to advertise the trial and if the temporary nature of the scheme is effectively communicated.

In order to introduce disabled parking spaces in the former covered market area a planning application would need to be submitted for a change of use of the area at a cost of £335. The group has been advised by local Planning Officers that at present it is unlikely that planning permission would be granted for the former covered market area to be used to provide car parking spaces to people with disabilities. However, the group believes that the success of this application would be justifiable for a trial period due to the limited use of the former covered market area at present.

Further concerns have been expressed about the potential health and safety implications involved in introducing disabled parking bays in the former covered market area. The proposed site for accessing the parking bays will require drivers to make a 90 degree turn at Silver Street before parking. During this time the driver would have reduced visibility which could create risks in an area frequented by pedestrians. There is also currently a high volume of pedestrian traffic, particularly for pedestrians who access the Kingfisher Shopping Centre through Fountain's

Recommendations

Recommendation 10 d

Passage. There is a risk that an increase in traffic in the former covered market area could place these pedestrians at risk of an accident.

To address these concerns the group believes that Fountain's Passage could potentially be closed to the public during the trial period. Pedestrians could be redirected to the Kingfisher Shopping Centre through the town centre. This action could have a beneficial impact on footfall on Alcester Street as well as on custom for market traders. However, Fountain's Passage is currently utilised as one of the primary fire exits for staff working in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre. Closure of the passage could, therefore, increase the health and safety risks of the scheme.

The group had been proposing that disabled parking spaces and a collection and delivery point for Dial a Ride vehicles should be introduced in the former covered market area. However, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was concerned about the number of difficulties that had been identified in relation to the proposal. Furthermore, the Committee agreed that further consultation needed to be undertaken with local businesses and representative of the Fire Authority to discuss the potential risks of the proposal. For this reason the Committee is proposing that further work should be undertaken by relevant Officers to review the implications of this proposal, in consultation with relevant partner organisations, prior to a decision being made on the subject.

Overview and Scrutiny Resolutions

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Resolution a

We recommend that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should receive the following update reports in six months time:

- a) an update concerning the support provided by Officers to the Redditch Disabled Access Group in relation to disability issues.

The launch of the Access for Disabled People Task Group review coincided with the departure of a long-serving member of staff who had assumed responsibility for disability access at Redditch Borough Council. The new Building Control Manager for North Worcestershire and new Equalities Policy Officer for Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council have assumed responsibility for disability access. Members of the group welcome the fact that both of these Officers have committed to continuing to provide support to groups and individuals at the Council working in support of people with disabilities.

However, both Officers have wide remits and extensive areas of responsibility across more than one Council. The group is concerned that in this context it might not be possible to prioritise support for individuals and groups representing people with disabilities in Redditch. To address this concern the group believes that a report, detailing the support provided by Officers on the subject of disabled access and any barriers encountered by those Officers, should be reported for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee is experienced in monitoring service delivery and could help to develop common understanding between Officers, Councillors and representatives of local disability groups regarding the level of support required.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee can determine which items should be added to the Committee's Work Programme and resolved to approve this recommendation on 14th August 2012. Consequently, the Executive Committee is being asked to note this change to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

Overview and Scrutiny Resolutions

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Resolution b

We recommend that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should receive the following update reports in six months time:

- b) a report monitoring the implementation of the group's recommendations.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitors the implementation of recommendations that are made by all scrutiny review groups. Generally, the first monitoring update report is received 12 months after a review has been completed to provide Council Officers and relevant partner organisations with time to implement actions approved by the Executive Committee. Occasionally, in cases where it has not been possible to implement recommendations during the 12 month period, further monitoring work is required.

The group believes that many of the recommendations detailed in this review could be implemented relatively quickly. As the focus of the review is upon providing assistance to vulnerable members of the local community Members believe that their recommendations should be implemented as a priority. To ensure that implementation of any approved actions takes place as soon as possible the group is therefore proposing that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should receive an initial monitoring update report focusing on implementation of any approved recommendations in six months time.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee can determine which items should be added to the Committee's Work Programme and approved this recommendation. Consequently the Executive Committee is being asked to note this change to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

Conclusion

The Access for Disabled People Task Group have completed a detailed review of access for people with disabilities to Redditch town centre. Throughout the review the Councillors were keen to identify actions that could be taken to improve access for people with all types of disabilities to the town centre as they feel that people with disabilities should have an equal opportunity to participate in society.

The group would like to thank every expert witness who provided evidence during the review. Without this evidence it would not have been possible to highlight example of current good practice or to identify actions that could be taken to improve access arrangements in future years. Hopefully this report will be of interest and use to each of the witnesses as well as to other organisations and individuals based in the town.

The Councillors are aware that they are proposing a relatively large number of recommendations and that action may be required from various organisations, including Redditch Borough Council, in order to implement their suggestions. However, they believe that, if approved, each of these actions would add value to those organisations and ultimately to people with disabilities.

The group therefore urges the Council's Executive Committee to approve their recommendations.

Appendix A: Draft Recommendations April 2012

The following recommendations were proposed by the Access for Disabled People Task Group in April 2012. These recommendations were altered following completion of additional work from May – August 2012.

We RECOMMEND that

DISABLED PARKING

1) Majority Recommendation:

Disabled parking spaces should be provided as part of any redevelopment of the former covered market area.

OR

Minority recommendation:

A section of the former covered market area located to the rear of the Debenhams unit should be converted for disabled parking for a trial period of six months.

2) Subject to the proposal for disabled parking to be introduced in the former covered market area being approved the Council should approach Age UK about the possibility of providing access to a number of scooters from the charity's shop unit which is located in that area.

3) A user friendly map demonstrating the location of disabled parking spaces and Shopmobility in Redditch town centre should be produced and promoted on the Council's website, in Redditch Matters and on the Palace Theatre's website and should be promoted to local businesses to use.

Appendix A: Draft Recommendations April 2012

- 4) The Redditch Town Centre Partnership should work with Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department, the Kingfisher Shopping Centre and other partner organisations to introduce delivery and collection points for vehicles carrying passengers with disabilities. The following options should be considered for this purpose:
 - a) the Apollo 2000 car park;
 - b) the former covered market area;
 - c) land within the vicinity of the Palace Theatre;
 - d) an area beside the Lloyds bank branch in Redditch; and
 - e) an area in the town centre that could be used by customers of the Apollo cinema.

TAXI SERVICES

- 5) Taxi companies should be offered licences to operate adapted vehicles for a longer period of time than standard vehicles to incentivise taxi firms to increase the number of adapted vehicles in their fleets. The vehicles should be permitted to operate for these lengthier periods of time subject to passing the two inspection tests and the MOT that the Council's licensing regime requires for each vehicle.
- 6) Taxi drivers should be offered disability awareness training, which would include information about manually assisting people with disabilities, by Redditch Borough Council.

BUSES

- 7) Worcestershire County Council's Transport Department should be asked to consider facilitating partnership working between local bus operators and another company in order to support the introduction of an audio-visual system on buses operating in Redditch.

Appendix A: Draft Recommendations April 2012

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8) A disability awareness session should be delivered as part of the Member Development Programme at Redditch Borough Council.
- 9) Ward Members should be made aware that they can use their knowledge of the local community to assess the condition of the pavements and dropped kerbs located in their wards and report their findings for the consideration of Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department and Redditch Borough Council's Environmental Services.
- 10) The Council's Planning Department should consider arranging for funding from Section 106 agreements to be allocated to the installation of tactile signage in the town centre for the use of people with sensory impairments and similarly funding for this form of signage should be incorporated as a requirement into a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging schedule for Redditch.
- 11) Redditch Town Centre Partnership should work with the Kingfisher Shopping Centre and other relevant partners to ensure that more seating is provided in the shopping centre.
- 12) Redditch Town Centre Partnership should approach the new owners of the Kingfisher Shopping Centre to discuss the possibility of:
 - a) providing people with disabilities with access to a changing places toilet; and
 - b) enacting the RNIB React signage system for the benefit of customers with sensory impairments.
- 13) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should receive a monitoring report in six months time concerning the support provided by Officers to the Redditch Access for Disabled Group and elected Members in relation to disability access issues.

Expert Witnesses

External Witnesses

The Councillors would like to thank the following expert witnesses from external organisations for contributing evidence during the review.

County Councillor John Smith OBE, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport.

Mr Wayne Arthur (Worcestershire County Council)

Mr Andy Baker (Worcestershire County Council)

Ms Debbie Degge (Worcestershire County Council)

Mr Perminder Dhillon (Kingfisher Shopping Centre)

Mr J Forrester (Apollo 2000)

Mr Matt Stone (Worcestershire County Council)

Ms Penny Venables (Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust)

Community Consultation

The group also interviewed a number of representatives of bus operators and taxi firms. The group has agreed to keep the identities of these expert witnesses confidential but would like to thank them all for providing evidence during the course of the review.

The group received 32 completed questionnaires from local residents. Each of these residents is thanked for contributing to the review.

The Councillors are also keen to thank members of the following local groups for contributing feedback to the review:

The Redditch Access for Disabled Group; and

The Redditch Older Peoples' Forum.

Expert Witnesses

Officers The group would like to thank the following Officers from Redditch Borough Council for providing evidence during the review:

Colin Audritt (former Building Control Manager and Access Officer)

Emma Baker (Acting Development Plans Manager)

Rebecca Dunne (Policy Manager).

Clare Flanagan (Legal Services Manager)

Matthew Fowler (Dial a Ride Driver)

Susan Garratt (Senior Licensing Practitioner, Worcestershire Regulatory Service)

Ruth Griffin (Dial A Ride and Shopmobility Manager)

Lyndsey Hadley (Policy Officer)

Mark Kay (Licensing Team Manager, Worcestershire Regulatory Service)

Pete Liddington (GIS/Engineering Design Officer)

Paul McLaughlin (Estates Team Manager)

Ailith Rutt (Development Management Manager)

Fiona Scott (Equalities Policy Officer)

Carl Walker (Environmental Services Manager)

Dave Wheeler (Leisure Services Manager)

Adrian Wyre (Building Control Manager)

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Glossary

Audio-Visual System

Audio-Visual systems on public transport provide written and spoken instructions to passengers.

Changing Places

Changing Places Toilets are facilities that provide more space and specialist equipment for the use of people with disabilities and their carers. This facility is particularly useful for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis or an acquired brain injury.

Certificate of Professional Competence

Professional drivers of buses, coaches and lorries are required to undertake a Driver Certificate of Professional Competence . This qualification consists of four parts: a theory test; case studies; a practical driving test; and a vehicle safety demonstration.

Community Infrastructure Levy

The Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule (CIL) is a levy that Councils can charge on new developments. The funding generated through the levy can be allocated to infrastructure that the Council or local community wants.

Confederation of Passenger Transport

The Confederation of Passenger Transport is the government recognised trade association for the bus, coach and light rail industries.

Core Strategy

The Core Strategy is one of a series of documents that shape planning policies at the local level and forms part of the Council's Local Development Framework. The Redditch Core Strategy is currently in the process of being prepared.

Executive Committee

Executive Committees are standard features of local democratic processes. Executive committees are designed to operate in a similar manner to the Cabinet at central government level. Members of Executive Committees have decision making powers. In Redditch these decisions are made collectively.

Glossary

Hackney Carriage Vehicles

Licensed hackney carriage vehicles can ply for hire at a hackney carriage stand (taxi rank) in the district in which the vehicle is licensed. Hackney carriage vehicles can be hailed in the street, though can also take advanced bookings.

Lifetime Homes

Domestic dwellings built in accordance with lifetime homes standards are designed to be flexible and adaptable and to meet the needs of people with different types of disabilities.

Local Development Framework

The Local Development Framework is the name for the collection of local development documents that provide the framework for spatial planning strategy in Redditch.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Overview and Scrutiny is a standard feature of local democracy which is designed to operate in a similar manner to Select Committees at the national government level. Overview and Scrutiny Committees cannot make decisions. However, Overview and Scrutiny Committees can hold local decision making bodies to account, can undertake policy reviews and can make recommendations to local decision makers.

Planning Advisory Panel

The Planning Advisory Panel is an informal Committee at Redditch Borough Council that advises the council's Executive committee on planning policy issues.

Planning Advisory Panel

Licensed Private Hire Vehicles can only accept journeys in response to advance bookings. The charges for journeys are not subject to Council control and should be agreed with the client prior to the journey.

Public Service Vehicles (PSVs)

Public Service Vehicles (PSVs) are passenger transport vehicles that can accommodate eight or more passengers.

Glossary

Redditch Access for Disabled Group

The Redditch Access for Disabled Group was established in 1989. The group comprises both members of the local community who have disabilities and service users who support people with disabilities. The group meets on the second Tuesday of every month at Redditch Town Hall. (Formerly know as the Redditch Disabled Access Group).

Redditch Older People's Forum

The Redditch Older People's Forum is an independent group representing the interests of elderly residents in Redditch. The Forum meets on the second Thursday of every month usually at the Ecumenical Centre in Redditch town centre.

Redditch Town Centre Partnership

The Redditch Town Centre Partnership comprises representatives of the public, private, voluntary and community sector. The focus of the partnership's work is on co-ordinating developments in the town centre.

RNIB React

The RNIB React signage system was developed by the RNIB charity to provide blind and visually impaired people with a talking direction system. The system is triggered by fobs carried by an individual and can be utilised in areas where the system has been installed and activated.

Safe Journey Cards

Safe Journey Cards were developed by First Group Plc. The cards can be displayed in a wallet or alongside a concessionary card and can provide useful written instructions to the driver regarding the individual's particular disability/ies and needs.

Section 106 Agreements

Section 106 agreements are legally binding agreements between local Planning Departments and landowners. The monies generated by the agreements can be used to support services and infrastructure.

Vehicle Operator Services Agency (VOSA)

The Vehicle Operator Services Agency (VOSA) provides a range of licensing, testing and enforcement services in relation to vehicles.

Overview and Scrutiny Contacts

For additional copies of this report, or to find out more about Overview and Scrutiny at Redditch Borough Council please contact:

Jess Bayley, Democratic Services Officer
Jess.bayley@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk 01527 64252 (3268)

Overview and Scrutiny
Member and Committee Services
Redditch Borough Council
Town Hall
Walter Stranz Square
Redditch
B98 8AH