

Equal Access Advisory Group

Meeting Notes – 24 January 2025 – Virtual

(Due to weather conditions the meeting was moved to virtual only)

Meeting Theme – Public Awareness and Changing Attitudes

Attendees – Dr Deborah Lawson (Chair), Cllr Kay Wesley, Denis Murphy, Alec Scaresbrook, Cathy Dean.

Apologies - Angela Ward, Diane Ritherdon, Pam Carey Tom Stephans, and Theresa Graystone.

1. Welcome from the chair.

2. Notes of the meeting of **12 December** accepted as a correct record.

3. Actions from previous minutes

- **Action** - Kay and Theresa to check out routes from Able World to Readsmore Surgery – **carry forward**
- **Action** – Dropped kerbs – Denis continuing to review dropped kerbs around the town centre. Footpath Morrisons no dropped kerb - Kay added to the action plan. Deborah to look at the route from an area where there is a high population of disabled residents into town/Tesco when the weather improves.
- **Action** - Cathy & Kay are working on an accessibility leaflet for shops with Deborah's input – **update below**
- **Action** - Ruth Burgess CTC looking at the gaps for benches <https://openbenches.org/#53.16171/-2.211541/17> - We are looking at plotting the benches then we can see where the gaps are.
- **Action** - list of articles for the Chronicle – Kay has written to the Chronicle and suggested a regular feature (Accessibility Corner). Kay to write a report summary from each meeting to send in, which can go on the news/blog section of the CTC website etc.
- **Action** – Shop Motability – what has happened to that? Can we include it in the Bridestones Shopping Centre? – Cathy contacted Shop Motability; they don't provide any equipment; it's more of a membership/recognition scheme. Don't have details of the previous service, the one in Chester is due to close soon. Kay / David will talk to the owners of the Bridestones area to see if it's something we could set up. Would need to be run by volunteers.
- **Action** – Cathy/Kay/Deborah to draw up terms of reference so members and potential new members understand and align with the purpose of the group. – **update below**

- **Action** – Engage with town organisations to understand their challenges. Kay to explore council involvement. While the group includes representation from the hard-of-hearing community, it does not currently have representation from the deaf community. Kay is in contact with Adam, and pending agreement on terms of reference we will invite him to the meeting.

4. Public Awareness

Deborah drafted ideas before the meeting which formed a basis for the discussion:

Council's Social Media

- Share facts, myths, and statistics about disability.
 - “Be Kind” or “Accessibility Benefits Everyone” campaign (or similar), featuring monthly tips on how the public can help and be more inclusive. Before events like the light switch on, these could be targeted around how to support disabled people in a crowd etc.
- **Action** – Cathy/Debbie design a social media campaign, and highlight before big events.

Chronicle

- Publish regular articles highlighting success stories, challenges, council and Equal Access Group initiatives, and ways the public can help.
 - Feature businesses that are accessible and welcoming (or do this on the council's social media platforms?).
- **Action** - Publish regular articles, a win-win for local businesses (Kay).

Mayor's Awards

- Use awards to recognise businesses, schools, or individuals who go that extra mile with accessibility and inclusivity.
- Highlight nominees/finalists/winners on council platforms to encourage positive competition and set examples. Winners could also feature in the Chronicle.

- Kay provided an update – a deliberate decision not to separate inclusivity or diversity as it should be baked into everything we do, so for all awards it will form the foundation.

Councillors

- Arrange for councillors to navigate the town in wheelchairs and visit inaccessible shops to understand the barriers faced by local disabled people.

Proposal: The council to lead by example by scheduling a mobility exercise for councillors to navigate the town with a disability and complete set tasks. Val and Alex to design the activity, ideally an afternoon before a July council meeting (pending confirmation of next year's meeting dates).

Schools

- Encourage all local schools to engage in disability awareness activities, especially around Disability History Month, Disability Pride, and International Day of Persons with Disabilities.
 - Deborah is publishing a children's book for KS1 this year focused on kindness, friendship, and inclusion (with free learning resources, colouring pages, and a school lesson plan). A council colouring competition, where children draw themselves in the forest (downloadable resource) and write a sentence next to themselves about what they can do to be kind to others, could be run during Disability Pride or History Month to encourage schools and children to discuss/think about inclusion and kindness.
 - Councils running a colouring competition from a children's book by a local author have been successfully implemented in other areas.
- In the past it's been difficult to engage with schools, they tend to be overwhelmed. They have engaged with white ribbon, Kay will mention to the high school. Deborah will be engaging with Primary schools. Potential to include some of Deborah's resources for young children during the council summer holiday activities.

Businesses

- Provide training resources to help businesses support disabled customers better.
- Promote the Disability Welcome scheme, which is about to be implemented by the council.
- Could produce flyers or small posters for shops to display with messages like "Be Kind" or "Accessibility Benefits Everyone," with ideas for the public on how to help.

- **Action** – ask Celeste to design business posters (use disability welcome logo) be kind/accessibility welcome. Deborah to send over a document – which includes good visuals for shops to use.
- **Action** – Cathy to research the best e-learnings and disability-positive training for staff and councillors.

Council Initiatives

- Use town noticeboards, the website, and newsletters to promote positive messages about disability and lead by example.
 - Feature regular stories about accessibility and disabled individuals on the council website/social media, ensuring respectful terminology in all features and use inclusive stock photography on their new website.
 - Continue improving event accessibility.
 - Produce the planned disability guide.
 - Add more seating/benches in Congleton, install a ramp at the back of the town hall etc.
- **Action** – Cathy to follow up with Mark (Town Hall Manager) regarding the ramp and accessible toilet sign.

Media Video – video is so powerful in telling stories and making people connect, videos have a bigger impact, would group members be willing to tell their story?

5. Leaflet

The group got the chance to review the leaflet before the meeting. The group agreed upon Deborah's list of amendments. The group also suggested a couple more amendments. The amendments in full:

- A web address/link with the QR code for people who don't use a smartphone
- Change the green boxes to black for better contrast
- Enlarge the tick boxes slightly (for those with limited dexterity)
- Offer the leaflet in large print if requested - maybe in just text format (then, if anyone's screen reader isn't compatible, they can also access it that way)
- Check the front-page text is large enough (12pt) & Reduce size of BRP text (Kay to summarise)
- Maybe change the pink on page 2 to softer/paler pink or mint green to make it easier to read

- Where it says “Lower counter,” – you might not need to add “(for people of short stature and wheelchair users)” as well
- The Silhouette image does not represent older people.
- White box – should be lined with placeholder information business name etc
- Adding in "Accessibility benefits everyone!" somewhere might be beneficial
- Call in action – hand in at / email info@

Action - Where does the QR code go? – Create a web page for business information to expand on the leaflet. Signpost to training, equipment such as ramps/handles etc Grant/Funding information. (Cathy)

6. Terms of Reference

Kay and Deborah have created terms of reference, and members must be willing to accept other viewpoints and conflicting needs. Because minutes are shared, member's input is not confidential.

Action – Cathy to combine the documents and send them to Kay/Deborah for review

7. AOB

Careers Fayre

The Cheshire and Warrington Pledge Partnership, Cheshire and Warrington Careers Hub, and Cheshire East Council are organising a Your Futures event for young people, specifically with disabilities/ Special Needs in Cheshire East.

Hosted at Congleton Leisure Centre, Worrall St, Congleton CW12 1DT on Wednesday 26th February 25, the fair will be organised similarly to standard careers fairs with all schools being invited to attend slots.

[Cheshire East 'Your Futures' Fair Tickets, Wed, Feb 26, 2025 at 8:30 AM | Eventbrite](#)

Action – CTC should attend – Cathy/Kay to sort

CEC Equality Policy

Alex & Val have been following up on the CEC Equality draft Policy 2025-2029, which is currently 80 pages long. No timeline has been decided to date.

Governments SEND Crisis

Between meetings, some group members discussed the government's current inquiry, which

focuses on achieving short-term stability and long-term sustainability for the SEND system to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people. [Deborah submitted evidence](#), which was published on the government's website.

Alex also shared that barriers on Biddulph Valley Way have been removed.

Future Meetings – Fridays aren't the best day so the proposed new dates are:

Tuesdays 11 am - 8th April / 17th June / 9th September / 18th November

Cathy to send calendar invites.