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Brighton and Hove City Council

Accessible Strategies

External Environment Review

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1 Introduction and methodology

As part of Brighton and Hove City Council's (BHCC) project to develop an accessible City strategy, we were asked to undertake a comparative review of various strategic approaches adopted by local authorities at a local, regional and national level in relation to accessibility. This was to identify any additional best practices not already included in BHCC's approach which might prove beneficial.

It was agreed the research for this report would need to be via web searches. Consequently, we reviewed in detail three authorities local to Brighton, i.e., Chichester, Lewes, Easbourne; three City authorities, i.e., London (including Mayor of London and the GLA), Leeds and Guildford that are broadly comparable with BHCC. In addition we undertook a deep dive into 20 local authorities plus a further skim review of 10 authority sites.

We also reviewed the Local Government Association (LGA) advice and the linkage with the government's Disability Strategy.

Clearly the results can only include published information and cannot identify any strategies being developed by authorities where they do not appear on individual websites.

2 Overview of findings

In essence the approach being adopted by BHCC, an authority-wide integrated and holistic strategy based on best practice, was not found to be duplicated anywhere else. This means BHCC should be considered a field and thought leader in its approach.

The key features which underpin BHCC's approach are:

- The establishment of underpinning principles, e.g., using the social model and removing barriers
- An authority-wide overarching strategy with agreed underpinning best practice principles and with the social model being at the heart of its approach;
- All Directorates to contribute to the strategy with their own action plans for which they will be accountable
- A central engagement and expert role being played by a Disability Panel and Wider Reference Group consisting of disabled people's organisations from around the City, as well as individuals with lived experience of disability
- The use of the Council's position to influence non-authority organisations to proactively engage with and support the Council's work and approach, e.g., other public sector bodies.

In the sections below we explore the key features of BHCC's approach and compare those approaches commonly adopted elsewhere.

It should be noted whilst no other authorities were identified as using a similar approach in its entirety, this does not mean other authorities are not addressing the issue of inclusion for disabled people. However, generally speaking, approaches appear to be based on themes and legal obligation.

Additionally, the term "accessibility" is widely used by all authorities but it is typically not defined and appears to be narrow in its application. As an example, many Local Authorities have what they define as an Accessibility Strategy, however, commonly they are limited to specific areas such as children, young people and SEND responsibilities and the built environment.

Through our research we did identify a range of operational good practice initiatives. Whilst it was not in our remit to identify such activities, we have shared these in Appendix 1 as they could prove a useful reference resource for some Directorates.

3 Underpinning principles

BHCC have established a series of underpinning principles based on best practice which inform its approach in this area. For example, using the social model and removing barriers as part of a business-as-usual process, ensuring disabled people are central to all aspects of the strategy, developing specific action plans and monitoring of performance.

This approach was not found anywhere else although The Greater London Authority (GLA) has established a set of underpinning values regarding their approach to promoting disability equality with high level outcomes. This was a good example which highlighted the following principles as central to their strategy and approach:

- Choice
- Independence
- Dignity
- Being welcoming

- Offering flexibility
- Being convenient
- Offering easy access
- Disabled people feeling comfortable
- Disabled people feeling safe
- Providing opportunities for everyone to fulfil their potential.

Despite these useful principles being identified, there was no evidence of an integrated strategic approach across all of the GLA's work. Nevertheless, establishing these values provides a useful touch point for the work of the GLA although they appear to be used in a limited manner. As a political / structural point, it does not have the degree of practical involvement in local contexts, e.g. infrastructure.

BHCC may wish to consider developing their own set of principles as an overt statement of understanding and their approach and include these in their overarching strategic aims.

All authorities have accessibility statements, but these tended to focus entirely on website access and there was no evidence of using this mechanism to drive inclusion across the board. BHCC should consider using accessibility statements as part of its public statement about its approach. However, it should take care to ensure such statements go further than itemising issues around websites. Indeed, such statements might well be linked to the values discussed above.

4 Authority-wide strategy

We could not identify any authorities who have developed a comparable organisational-wide strategic approach which is being adopted by BHCC. All authorities considered the specific issues related to accessibility and disabled people, however, typically these were contained in issue-specific strategies and often in support of legal obligations. Most common were:

- Transport
- Education
- Adult social care
- Children's' services
- Housing and the built environment
- Tourism and the wider visitor economy.

A number of Councils we reviewed had specific strategies for some or all of these areas, which did take account of disabled people and their accessibility requirements. However, their approaches lacked the consistent and strategic approach planned by BHCC and we found no evidence of best practice underpinning principles.

The main priorities for authorities in relation to accessibility considerations were:

- Transport and access to the town centre
- Creating equal life chances for all

- Housing design and choice
- The protection and enhancement of social infrastructure
- Building an accessible visitor infrastructure
- Building safe and accessible neighbourhoods and communities
- Creating an inclusive environment for all.

Any plans around these issues then addressed specific issues by, for example, issuing guidance on planning and inclusive design, building sustainable communities and so on.

Our research did identify some good examples of specific strategies which, although not taking an organisation-wide approach, do provide some good practice examples for BHCC to consider.

The London Assembly offered a number of good practice examples which are shared here.

- [The Mayor's strategy for equality, diversity and inclusion | London City Hall](#) – this is a strategy that incorporates all aspects of inclusion, rather than focusing on the single issue of accessibility for disabled people. However, it does not take a whole organisation approach and addresses disability specifically.
- This overall EDI strategy has been supplemented by a set of specific commitments to support Deaf and disabled people across London, which is detailed at [Deaf and disabled communities | London City Hall](#)
- [Accessible communication policy | London City Hall](#) is a good example of how London has built accessibility into its communications approach.

Leeds City Council also provided a number of issue specific approaches and strategies which we have identified as providing best practice approaches. These include:

- A strategy that focused the Council's priorities on building a healthy environment for people of all ages across the city. This can be found at [Health and wellbeing strategy \(leeds.gov.uk\)](#)
- The Council's Parks and Green Spaces strategy specifically focused on accessibility for all and ensuring disabled people have access to these outdoor opportunities. This can be found at [Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2022 to 2032 \(leeds.gov.uk\)](#)
- The Council's strategy on dementia identified the building blocks required to be a dementia-friendly city and both the priorities and actions required by the Council and their partners. Details can be found at [Dementia strategy \(leeds.gov.uk\)](#)

5 Accessibility is everyone's responsibility

BHCC will require all of its Directorates to develop their own approach to ensuring accessibility in their areas of responsibility within an overarching framework. This will include establishing action plans which link directly into the authority-wide strategic

aims. These plans will take into account the overlaps and intersectionality issues which exist between Directorates. The end result of this approach will be an integrated authority-wide action plan directly linked to delivering the overarching strategic aims.

Given the above it was not surprising, therefore, that our research has been unable to identify any authority which required each of their Directorates to develop an action plan related to ensuring accessibility for all of their work and services. Clearly such issues were considered but not at a strategic level.

6 Engagement of disabled people and their organisations

BHCC's approach has at its core, a panel of disabled peoples' organisations and individuals with lived experience of disability which is further informed by a Wider Reference Group. This Panel and Wider Reference Group will play a key role in supporting the Council develop, plan, monitor and evaluate its approach. This Panel will also ensure wider engagement amongst disabled people and their organisations to ensure a broad base approach and that varying views are taken into consideration.

We found that most authorities have some degree of consultation and involvement from disabled people. However, we found no comparable examples to the approach in use by BHCC. The range of the approaches adopted is illustrated below.

The GLA has developed an Advisory Group specifically focused on developing the Arts whilst supporting and involving disabled people. This is an interesting approach in ensuring accessibility is not only about practical day-to-day elements, but also includes involvement in wider community events. Details of the group can be found at [Liberty Advisory Group | London City Hall Liberty Advisory Group](#). The details of what the approach is achieving can be found at [Liberty, inclusivity and the arts' recovery | London City Hall](#)

Transport for London has created a specific involvement and engagement group, details of which can be found at [https://madeby.tfl.gov.uk/2020/12/02/idag-members/#:~:text=Our%20Independent%20Disability%20Advisory%20Group%20\(IDAG\)%20is%20a%20panel%20of,barriers%20to%20accessing%20public%20transport](https://madeby.tfl.gov.uk/2020/12/02/idag-members/#:~:text=Our%20Independent%20Disability%20Advisory%20Group%20(IDAG)%20is%20a%20panel%20of,barriers%20to%20accessing%20public%20transport). This demonstrated a specific commitment to ensure that transport across all forms was made as accessible as possible. This is similar to the approach taken by BHCC and offers some best practice ideas for BHCC to consider.

Guildford Borough Council has a long-established disability advisory group, which has been in existence since 1978. This is a voluntary group which advises the Council and provides feedback on key issues that impact on disabled people. As with other examples, this group offers operational feedback on services, rather than contributing to the strategic direction of the authority. Given the length of time this group has been in existence, connecting in with this group may offer valuable insight for BHCC. Further details can be found at [The Guildford Access Group - Guildford Borough Council](#)

Eastbourne Council has a Disability Involvement Group with 25 members and includes one Council representative. The group provides feedback on issues such as transport, dropped kerbs and development plans. Further details can be found at <https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/community/eastbourne-disability-involvement-group/>.

The Group has an agreed Terms of Reference which can be found at [EASTBOURNE DISABILITY INVOLVEMENT GROUP \(lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk\)](https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/eastbourne-disability-involvement-group/). In some ways These are similar to the terms agreed for the BHCC Disability Panel, however, the group sets its own agenda and does not include a specific link to supporting the development of any Council strategy.

Chichester Council has a District Access Group which is made up of volunteers, but there is no apparent formal link to Council strategy development. Further details can be found at <https://www.chichesterdistrictaccessgroup.org.uk/>

7 Influencing beyond the authority

BHCC intends to use its wider influence and role to drive change outside its direct areas of responsibility.

We found limited examples of other Local Authorities using their influence with partner organisations and other stakeholder to address accessibility for disabled people. This is not to suggest this does not occur, but rather this is not publicised on Council websites or appear to be part of any strategic approach. However, there was one example, again albeit limited, which involved the Health Agencies within the Leeds area working together with the Local Authority under the banner of the health economy. Details of this approach can be found at [One minute guide: Health economy \(leeds.gov.uk\)](https://www.leeds.gov.uk/one-minute-guide-health-economy)

8 Local Government Association (LGA)

The LGA does provide a range of resources including case studies, research and comment on accessibility issues within the local government sector.

We have set out below a number of case studies from the LGA of Local Authority initiatives which have begun to address accessibility for disabled people in specific situations. These tend to be more operational in nature, but again these, along with others on the LGA site, might prove a useful reference resource for Directorates.

The LGA has showcased Leeds as a positive example of building equality into their planning approach. Further details of the case study can be found at [Equality and Strategic Planning – Leeds City Council | Local Government Association](https://www.leeds.gov.uk/equality-and-strategic-planning-leeds-city-council-local-government-association)

They also provide a number of potentially useful case studies which focus on support that Local Authorities can provide in terms of making life accessible for people with learning disabilities.

Again Leeds was highlighted as an example of providing leadership in this area. The case study can be found at [Leeds 'Good Lives Leaders' | Local Government Association](#)

A further series of useful case studies across different Local Authorities can be found at [Health inequalities: Learning disabilities case studies | Local Government Association](#). These examples showcase good practice around:

- Supported and independent living
- Improving communication skills
- Unlocking potential
- Promoting good health.

9 National Disability Strategy

The UK National Disability Strategy was launched in 2021 and will clearly need to be considered in the development of BHCC's Accessible City Strategy.

The national strategy was widely consulted on and the views used to inform the strategy. This involved disabled people, their families and carers. The strategy is rooted in the lived experience of disabled people and focuses on the social model as an approach to identify and tackle barriers. However, it should also be noted that the strategy was not well received by many disabled people and their organisations and they believed the consultation with them was flawed and insufficient. Nevertheless some aspects of the strategy may help inform BHCC's work in this field.

The consultation identified 7 core areas that disabled people experienced barriers with in their everyday lives and included:

- At home
- When commuting
- At work or in education
- When shopping or getting about
- When accessing public services online
- In feeling connected to others.

Clearly these are key touch points that the Accessible City Strategy will need to address through the Directorate's contributions and action plans.

The National Strategy has 3 parts, which will need to be reflected in the development of BHCC strategic approach and include:

- Part 1: Action now – practical steps to improve disabled people's everyday life
- Part 2: The longer-term ambition: putting disabled people at the heart of the design and delivery of services
- Part 3: A cross-government effort to transform disabled people's everyday life.

Part 3 will inevitably involve local government in the delivery of these outcomes including housing, transport, health and social care and education (amongst others).

Further details of the National Disability Strategy can be found at [National Disability Strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/national-disability-strategy).

Alongside the publication of the National Disability Strategy, the Government also published the results of the UK Disability Survey. Again this may prove a useful resource for Directorates in shaping their approach.

The survey identified that public perceptions of disabled people were a significant barrier to participation in areas including employment and education, and that the majority of disabled respondents to the survey felt that public attitudes towards disabled people were unhelpful. These findings underscore the need to improve public understanding and awareness of disability, to improve public attitudes towards disabled people, and to inspire social change across the UK. Clearly this will need to inform many of the actions that BHCC Directorates will need to develop.

Over half of disabled respondents reported being worried about being insulted or harassed in public places, and a similar proportion reported being mistreated because of their disability. Stronger measures are needed to tackle disability discrimination and hate crime. This is one of the key barriers discussed in the BHCC's principles document and will need to be addressed alongside more outcome-based actions within the Directorates.

Many disabled people and carers who had experienced difficulty accessing public buildings also reported difficulty accessing important public services. These findings highlighted the need to make accessing public services, including online services, as smooth and easy as possible.

Finally, over half of disabled respondents not in employment reported that they would like more help finding and keeping a job. Of those in employment, half of disabled respondents felt their employer was flexible and made sufficient reasonable adjustments, and half of carers felt their employer was supportive of their caring responsibilities. Only a quarter of disabled people and carers felt they had the same promotion opportunities as their colleagues. These findings highlight the need to improve support for disabled people to start or stay in work, to create more inclusive workplaces where disabled employees have equal chance to progress, and to strengthen rights in the workplace for both disabled people and carers

The full research report can be found at [UK Disability Survey research report, June 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94422/uk-disability-survey-research-report-june-2021.pdf)

Further research was undertaken by the Disability Unit and Policy Lab. This research focused on case studies around the lived experiences of disabled people, rather than providing research based on a representative sample.

The key areas explored included:

- Feeling valued and having a sense of self-worth
- Participants' identities (e.g., labelling, stigma etc.)
- Receiving and living with a diagnosis
- Using the benefits system

- Accessing formal support
- Family relationships and friendships
- Going outdoors.

Full details of the research report can be found at [Exploring the everyday lives of disabled people - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/research-data-and-analysis/publications/exploring-the-everyday-lives-of-disabled-people)

The final piece of research from a national level which might assist BHCC was specifically related to COVID. The research undertaken in 2020 by the Disability Unit focuses on the experiences disabled people had during the COVID pandemic response. This is likely to be an important focus for BHCC as it develops the Accessible City Strategy, whilst beginning to come out of its pandemic response.

The report can be found at [The lived experience of disabled people during the COVID-19 pandemic - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/research-data-and-analysis/publications/the-lived-experience-of-disabled-people-during-the-covid-19-pandemic)

9 Conclusions

BHCC should be seen as a leader in the development of a comprehensive Accessible City Strategy, which aims to address, in an integrated way, all forms of access requirements for both residents and visitors to the area.

The majority of other Local Authorities do consider accessibility issues, but they tended to be driven by individual departments or initiatives.

Appendix 1

Supplementary examples of good practice initiatives

Transport

This is a common issue for Authorities when planning their approach to accessibility. Providing information about the accessibility of transport (both public, private, cycling and on foot) is seen as critical in any approach to the success of an accessible strategy.

In the pursuit of accessible transport a range of approaches were used:

- Creating an illustrated journey through an accessible environment to allow people to visualise the journey
- Providing accessible information points throughout a person's journey
- Ensuring access to sufficient and suitable blue badge parking facilities
- Ensuring staff providing public transport are suitably trained in supporting disabled people using the transport.

Older infrastructure and inaccessible vehicle legacy issues continue to be a factor in providing accessible transport which inevitably had a broader impact on other accessible priorities such as social engagement and employment.

To seek to achieve a level of consistency in ensuring accessible transport the Department for Transport issued a policy paper entitled The Inclusive Transport Strategy: achieving equal access for disabled people which can be found at [Inclusive Transport Strategy: achieving equal access for disabled people - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Housing and the Built Environment

The Greater London Authority has developed specific guidance included in the Shaping Neighbourhoods Accessible London: Achieving an Inclusive Environment – Supplementary Planning Guidance.

This document provided advice to boroughs, developers, designers and planning applicants on implementing inclusive design principles.

Further details can be found at [Accessible London: Achieving an Inclusive Environment | London City Hall](#)

The City of London made similar strategic commitments, particularly to building an inclusive environment and published a number of guidance documents to support this approach. Further details can be found at [Inclusive design - City of London](#)

Transport for London has created a Streetscape Guidance document, which sets a high standard for the design of streets and spaces to take account of inclusive design practice. The key elements of the guidance include:

- Footways
- Carriageways

- Crossings
- Kerbside activity
- Footway amenities
- Safety and functionality
- Street environment
- Transport interchanges.

Further details of this approach can be found at [Streetspace funding and guidance - Transport for London \(tfl.gov.uk\)](#)

Leeds City Council has also taken a strategic approach to building accessibility across the City. One of the key focuses is a commitment to build and develop an accessible City infrastructure.

It has provided supplementary planning guidance to ensure accessible and inclusive design principles are factored into all relevant decisions. The guidance is pan-impairment and provides a clear flowchart of where inclusive design principles sit within the design and planning process, including impacting on key decisions.

It specifically considered inclusive design and accessibility when making planning decisions around:

- Change of use
- New shop front applications
- Access alterations
- New build development
- Aesthetics.

It provided a checklist for applicants and developers around issues they need to consider when making an application.

The Council also provided Inclusive Design Information Sheets to provide further guidance which covers:

- Paths and path gradients
- Seating and street furniture
- Ramps (external)
- Steps (external)
- Disabled parking (off highway)
- Entrance doors
- Glazing manifestations
- Colour / visual contrast
- Accessible toilets
- Sources of further information.

Further details can be found at [Supplementary Planning Documents and guidance \(leeds.gov.uk\)](#)

A significant number of local authorities are using the Lifetime Homes Standard, which incorporates inclusive by design principles, to supplement their thinking,

planning and decision making when looking at all planning applications (whether for new build developments, refurbishments or changes). A checklist has been created which a number of Local Authorities reference using in making key decisions. Further information can be found at [Microsoft Word - Lifetime Homes Standards Checklist - April 2015 \(lbbd.gov.uk\)](#)

The Planning Advisory Service provided further guidance and a number of case studies involving Local Authorities.

As a further resource the Improvement and Development Agency has produced a Good practice Guide in Access to Housing and Good Housing Services. This can be found at [Layout 1 \(housinglin.org.uk\)](#).

Tourism and the Wider Visitor Economy.

Research by Accessible suggests that 98% of people with access requirements checked the location criteria before visiting a location for the first time. The research further suggests that 76% of disabled people with access needs choose not to visit a location if they are unable to find the accessibility information they require.

To achieve this, some local authorities are requiring all new hotel developments to have a minimum number of accessible rooms. This allows the planning process within the Council, to directly influence this key element of the visitor economy.

Chester is recognised across the UK as a city with a significant heritage culture. Like in Brighton, this has created challenges to disabled people who have access requirements. The City has addressed these challenges head on and became the first UK city to win the European Access Award in 2017.

Chester has undertaken a wide ranging, comprehensive and ongoing programme of works to ensure it is as accessible as possible. Actions have included:

- Creating wheelchair access wherever possible to heritage parts of the City, including installing lifts and escalators where this was an option
- Providing accessible information panels in the city
- Accessible visitor information is available via a dedicated App
- Ability Angels (volunteers) who provide friendly company and support with shopping for disabled visitors who require this
- Building strong links with ShopMobility
- Providing significant amounts of Blue Badge parking throughout the City
- All City transport is fully accessible, together with a Dial-A-Ride service which provides wheelchair accessible vehicles
- Having a strong focus on providing appropriate changing places and accessible toilets across the City.

In addition an Action Forum (similar to the planned Disability Panel) has been established to guide and support much of this development. The Forum has a key role in the design of major new developments including retail, culture, leisure, transport and health facilities.

As a further resource In terms of guidance, English Heritage in 2015 produced a guidance document called Easy Access to Historic Buildings which may be of use in determining what is appropriate within the context of Brighton's heritage environment. Further details can be found here [Easy Access to Historic Buildings \(historicengland.org.uk\)](http://historicengland.org.uk)

Health

The LGA has undertaken research specifically related to people with learning disabilities and highlighted their experience during the COVID situation. This research can offer BHCC suggestions on how to ensure this group of people are not left behind in the recovery period from the pandemic. Full details can be found at [Health inequalities: Learning disabilities and COVID-19 | Local Government Association](#)

Wider Community

The LGA has provided some useful case studies and commentary on supporting disabled people to be able to take an active part in the community and in democracy. They have provided two specific resources around supporting disabled people to become involved in local Government and in the wider community. These can be found at:

- [The 'So what, what next?' project: supporting people with a learning disability, autism or both to use their skills and interests to play a part in the community \(local.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Make a difference. Be a councillor. A guide for disabled people. \(local.gov.uk\)](#)

