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SCRUTINY INQUIRY PANEL - ACCESSIBLE SOUTHAMPTON MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 DECEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors Rayment (Vice-Chair), Coombs and Guest

Apologies: Councillors Vaughan and Streets

8. **APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)**

The apologies of Councillors Vaughan and Streets were noted. Councillor Rayment – Vice Chair, was noted as Chair for the purposes of the meeting.

9. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

10. **ACCESSIBLE SOUTHAMPTON - ACCESSIBILITY TO TRANSPORTATION AND RELATED INFRASTRUCTURE**

The Panel considered the report of the Service Director – Legal and Business Operations detailing an introduction to the inquiry's context and background and noted the following presentations.

What contributes to good accessibility in transport and infrastructure from Disabled People's Viewpoint? – Ian Loynes, Chief Executive, Spectrum CIL

- A presentation was delivered by Ian Loynes, summarising the key issues raised at the Accessible Southampton Focus Group meeting.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
 - On the whole things are improving with regards to the accessibility of transport in Southampton. The ability for Disabled People to be spontaneous remains a challenge.
 - **General principles to follow** - Good Access should be built in at the design phase; Ask Disabled People – Co-produce is cost effective; Public transport should include all, segregated transport is not the answer (Dial-a-Ride) - expensive & exclusionary; Consider the whole experience - Booking / tickets, getting to the public transport destination, interchanges (car-taxi-bus-train); Proper consideration of pedestrians, particularly those who have impaired senses; It doesn't matter how good/bad provision is, if customer service is wrong.
 - **Buses & Coaches** - All buses should have more than just one designated space for wheelchair users, as we need or wish to travel together with other wheelchair users.
 - Creative and flexible design of bus interiors
 - Importance of trained, aware and proactive drivers
 - Buses should have large clear and well-lit route numbering and destination signs
 - Sensible seating within bus shelters and bus timetables at bus stops in an accessible position.

- **Taxi's** - Generally wheelchair users have to book in advance, spontaneity not enabled except at Southampton Central.
- All taxis should be accessible
- Some taxi drivers are reluctant to pick up wheelchair users and allow assistance dogs on board.
- **Trains** - Generally good at main stations, most rail staff tended to be happy to help.
- Lack of spontaneity compared with non-disabled people - Supposed to book at least 24hrs ahead, although better at main stations.
- Not so good when plans change
- **Car Travel / Car Parking**- difficulty finding suitable accessible parking spaces, even outside of busy times
- Some people with mental health conditions or learning difficulties also mentioned difficulties with getting 'Blue Badge' Parking Permits for people with non-mobility impairments.
- Lack of consideration of the real needs of Disabled drivers - Design & placement of parking spaces and car parks needs to reflect variety of car designs with appropriate signage to reflect usage.
- Entry/ticket barriers are not usable by many Disabled drivers, simply because they cannot reach the buttons without leaving the vehicle, even asking for help usually needs a button to be pressed - Design with Disabled People.
- Civic Centre Car Park - These are the best spaces in the City that I can use [wheelchair user](not end to end parking) - Currently, if there's an event going on, the Civic Centre car park is usually closed.
- **Shopmobility** - West Quay ShopMobility is still provided, just differently - via Customer Services desk. It is now free and bookable in advance. The City Centre ShopMobility scheme had almost 3,000 hires last year and it is estimated that over a third of customers using the scheme spend over £50 per city centre visit. Needs to be ShopMobility scheme in other shopping areas of the city.
- **Signage** – Some colours used are not good for visually impaired people. Recommend that transport providers work with local Disability groups to audit signage, both at transport hubs and on vehicles, and make improvements to ensure that signage is fully accessible to all Disabled passengers.

Key ingredients of an accessible city – Graham Garnett, Inclusive Design Officer, Liverpool City Council & former Senior Access Officer at Cheshire West & Chester

- Key points raised by Graham during his verbal presentation:
 - Cheshire West and Chester and Liverpool City Council both follow the social model of disability. People are disabled due to the barriers that exist in society rather than the impairments of the individual. Our job is to remove these barriers.
 - **Chester** have employed an Access Officer continuously since 1991
 - Improving access has been a corporate priority since the mid 1990's and is embedded in the culture of the organisation.
 - Chester employs the principle of least restrictive access approach
 - Corporate Disability Access Forum set up in 2013

- EU Access City Award winner in 2017 (only ever UK winner)
- Storyhouse Cultural Centre – CDAF key role in design of building. Input led to Changing Place, gender neutral toilets (important for significant % of population), removable seating to enable people to sit together if a member of party is in a wheelchair.
- Bus interchange – 2018 Accessible Transport Project of the Year – CDAF input led to a ‘map for all’ being installed, Changing Place, tactile paving to enable visually impaired to navigate the bus station, bins with yellow tops that are visible for partially sighted people.
- Access guides and interpretation panels show wheelchair access points for the historic city walls.
- It is worth investing in improvements and services that encourage disabled people to visit your city. £249bn value of the ‘purple pound’.
- **Liverpool** has had a strong commitment to accessibility for a long time. Liverpool City Council has an Accessible & Inclusive City Cabinet Member to ensure that these are mainstreamed across the Council.
- Liverpool has strong planning policies in relation to accessibility – Urban Design 4 – All new developments must meet the highest standards of accessibility and inclusion. The Access Officer can insist on BS 8300 standards rather than minimum standards. Hotel rooms with ceiling hoists in Liverpool are an example of this.
- H12 – Accessible Housing Policy – Most ambitious in UK. All new housing must be at least M4(2), accessible or adaptable housing with 10% M4(3) wheelchair accessible. This will increase supply of accessible and adaptable homes meaning that Disabled People can remain in their homes; reduces expensive social care packages; improves sustainability of communities.
- Liverpool has a Corporate Access Forum similar to Chester. Key role in contributing to the design of new developments. New Everton FC stadium will be the most accessible in the UK – 14 gender neutral toilets, 3 Changing Places (37 Changing Places in Liverpool with 8 more planned).
- Liverpool & Chester require all Hackney Carriages to be wheelchair accessible. The accessible fleet contributes to home to school transport and accessing day care provision.
- Accessible rail is more problematic outside main train stations. Merseyside has 40 new trains that are accessible including level access from train to platform. No need to book in advance for these services.
- Access Officer role is essential. Challenge developers and planners to improve accessibility in designs.
- Priorities for Southampton to introduce, besides an Access Officer, include high level commitment in the Corporate Plan and Planning policy (this gives you the tools to achieve what you want) & a Cabinet Member or Lead Member to champion accessibility that the Access Officer can work alongside.
- Financial, legal and moral rationale for improving accessibility. It is the right thing to do.

All Aboard Project – Emma Hurst, Project Co-ordinator, Rose Road Association

- A presentation was delivered by Emma. Key points raised in her presentation included the following:

- In 2019 Scope surveyed 2,000 people about how difficulties around using public transport affects their ability to lead independent, confident and connected lives. The research found that two thirds of disabled people had experienced problems using public transport in the last year & 30 percent of disabled people say that difficulties with public transport have reduced their independence.
- For young people with severe disabilities there can be even more barriers to rail travel. In April 2020 Rose Road was awarded a grant from South Western Railway which aimed to address some of these issues and to build confidence.
- The project has aimed to encourage young people, and their parents/carers, to travel by train by providing the following: Step by step guides using PCS (Picture Communication System) to travelling by train; Key Facts and Photo routes aimed to help young disabled people to identify local places they want to visit, understand the information available to them, and inspire confidence that their rail journey will be accessible; Helping buy tickets and book assistance; Catching the train – a visual story in film format with subtitles; Working with Ordnance Survey to produce maps which include accessibility features such as surface, incline, lighting, dropped curbs, obstacles – plan is to produce twelve maps in urban spaces around train spaces; Hampshire and Isle of Wight Accessible Travel Facebook Group where people can ask questions about accessible travel; A sensory story about a train trip.
- The project finishes in March 2022. Information is still being collected. The feedback that we have received to date has been largely positive, but the following issues still remain:
 - Attitudes of some staff and fellow passengers
 - Buses not suitable if several wheelchair users are travelling so dependent on other forms of transport to reach station
 - Worries about changes to timetable
- South Western Railway staff have had training and are taking it seriously and improvements to the accessibility of the rolling stock would be welcomed.

How the Council contributes to making Southampton's transport and related infrastructure accessible to all – Place Directorate, SCC

- A presentation was delivered by Pete Boustred – Divisional Head of Green City and Infrastructure; Wade Holmes – Transport Delivery Team Leader; and Phil Bates – Licensing Manager, Southampton and Eastleigh Licensing Partnership.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
 - **Buses** - 230+ buses operate in Southampton all buses can 'kneel' to meet raised kerbs at bus stops making it quicker and simpler for wheelchair and less mobile to access
 - Buses have at least 1 designated wheelchair space where wheelchair users have priority over other users
 - Onboard the buses 86% have 'next stop' audio and visual bus stops – last remaining being upgraded by operators
 - Local bus operators provide large format printed timetables for the visually impaired – these are available from travel shops

- Bus Stops - SCC uses the TfL guidance (over and above national guidance) and a local Basis of Design is being developed for bus stops
- Bus operators participate in a number of schemes to improve the accessibility of buses. First are signatories to the RNIB charter to assist passengers with visual impairments – stopping at bus stops if there is someone waiting and talking to passengers about the route; Bluestar run Helping Hand Scheme using a card that provides information on any assistance they may require; All buses fully compliant with The Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) – National Disability Strategy (p43) includes a commitment to review the PSVAR regulations, starting with research in 2022; Driver training – carry out periodical training or internal campaigns.
- Bus Service Improvement Plan - Developed jointly with bus operators and published in October 2021 - Vision that buses are inclusive & value for money
- Request for DfT funding to deliver: Upgrades to all bus stops in Southampton to meet standards; Accessibility audits to bus stops – footways, security; Work with user groups to develop assistive technologies; Continue Independent Travel Training; Innovative and capped fares.
- Next step to create an Enhanced Partnership by March 2022
- **Trains** - Of the eight stations in Southampton, one is fully accessible – Southampton Central with lifts to all platforms, hearing loops, digital displays, staff etc. The remaining are partially or not accessible.
- Future improvements being developed through updated Station Travel Plans – these include accessibility audits.
- South Western Railway are the main rail operator in Southampton. They are happy to support and engage on specific issues.
- **Ferries** - Red Funnel have plans for 2022 to improve vessels – lifts, toilets, seating and safety communications
- Customer service staff provide assistance before, during and after voyage
- **Taxis** - Hackney Carriages - the number is fixed at 283 with plates 214-283 required to be Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV). Should any plate from 001 to 213 become available as a new licence it will also have to be a WAV.
- Private Hire - 1,029 private hire vehicles licensed, 48 are WAVs.
- Taxi operators have difficulty fulfilling wheelchair work because of the lack of vehicles, particularly at school run times when the vehicles are required for pupil transport.
- The Council is in the process of organising the next unmet demand survey and can ask they look at this in more detail. The survey is likely to take place in April/May 2022.
- **Parking** - Disabled Parking widely distributed in locations across the City Centre, District Centres and Resident Parking Zones
- 143 Disabled Bays available in SCC Off Street Car Parks in City Centre and District Centres. Level access and lifts to street level and walkways are available in all Council Multi-Storey car parks; Surface car parks do not carry a charge for Blue Badge Holders
- SCC Parking Standards (a statutory Planning document) sets out minimum number of proportion for disabled parking in new developments and meet design standards

- **Active travel & Micromobility** - Social prescribing pilot, EOI stage 1 successful & awaiting outcome of stage 2 bid to progress onto feasibility - Proposal to develop a walking and cycling referral scheme targeting adults and children, who live in the some of the most deprived areas for those who have high inactivity levels including those with disabilities. A range of cycles will be offered to ensure the pilot is inclusive, including adaptable bikes, child seats and trailers.
- **Signage** – Legible Cities signage has been around for some time. Keen to see how we can improve and adapt them to make them more accessible.
- **Home to School Transport** - 1200 children receive H2ST. 1021 of those have SEND and qualify due to distance or exceptional circumstances and are transported to special schools in taxis, accessible minibuses or receive personal travel budgets.
- Independent travel training (ITT) has proven to be beneficial in enabling young students to have equality, access and independence. It has been geared towards children with special needs who currently use and are eligible for H2ST.
- Integrated transport planning is key to prevent end to end journey failures for Disabled People. The Council has a key role in setting policy and working with operators.
- As part of our funding bid to Department for Transport under the Active Travel Fund, Council has applied (amongst other items) for £100k capital funding for Accessibility Improvements. Although not established yet, if the bid is successful a governance framework will be set up to allocate the £100k which is likely to take the form of an accessibility forum with a terms of reference / membership yet to be determined. The application was for funding for the 2022/23 financial year, and Council is waiting for an announcement from the Department for Transport.
- At the moment, the Council is in the design process for two interchanges – a rail / bus one, and a bus interchange. Opportunity to reflect best practice in the design of these facilities and to engage Disabled People.