



# PERSONAL AND HEALTH SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

## Report on the Review of the Scrutiny Panel Report of Facilities for Disabled People in Town Centres

10<sup>th</sup> June 2003

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## **1. INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIR OF THIS SCRUTINY PANEL TO THE REVIEW**

- 1.1 On the 21<sup>st</sup> April 2001, the Personal and Lifelong Learning Services Scrutiny Panel published a report on Facilities for Disabled People in Town Centres. The report made recommendations for the improvement of town centres to make them more compatible with the needs of disabled people. The scrutiny exercise had been undertaken following a request from the Ashton-under-Lyne District Assembly.
- 1.2 In April 2003, the Scrutiny Panel reviewed the progress with the implementation of its report and received responses from service areas responsible for District Assemblies, Engineering, Social Services Adult Services and a corporate response.
- 1.3 On the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2003, the Panel received further information from officers representing the service areas referred to above. This information was in response to the recommendations contained in the original report, the actions taken to date and those planned in the future, together with additional comments made at the meeting.

## **2. SUMMARY**

This report, which was approved by the members of the Personal and Health Services Scrutiny Panel on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2003 follows up an earlier report published in 2001.

The original report contained a series of recommendations relating to practical measures to improve facilities in town centres for people with disabilities together with a wide corporate approach to the needs of disabled people.

Many of these issues have or are being addressed as shown in the responses from the Heads of Service involved. There is still a need for a more corporate and co-ordinated approach to the needs of disabled people and the designation of the Strategic Director, Social Services to have a strategic overview was welcomed by the Scrutiny Panel.

It was also felt that disabled people themselves should be more involved in staff training and that disabled people should have a greater involvement in design and construction programmes and planning of projects

The urban environment can be very difficult for many people not only those with disabilities and a reduction in town centre clutter both fixed and temporary would be very beneficial.

Enforcement of environmental issues is an area where the Tameside Patrollers Service could play a significant role. Litter is an unsightly nuisance but for a disabled person it can be dangerous. Similarly, advertising boards can be both a hazard and an obstruction on footways. It would be possible for patrollers to either note and report them or use their good contacts to have them placed in less dangerous positions.

It hoped that their follow up report shows the importance that this Scrutiny Panel places on following up the outcomes of its reports to ensure that they are implemented and appropriate.

### **3. MEMBERSHIP OF PANEL**

Panel members who have participated in the compilation and approval of this report :-

Councillors Bell (Chair), Doubleday, Joe Fitzpatrick, P Harrison, Hilditch, and Middleton

### **4. REVIEW FINDINGS**

- 4.1 In response to new government legislation/circulars regarding equalities issues, the Council has undertaken to address this within its general process of development of Council policies and delivery of services. This undertaking has also applied with the development of documents such as the Tameside Community Strategy where consultation took place with organisations such as the Tameside 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector Coalition, with an emphasis on young people with a disability.
- 4.2 In order to meet the requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act, Disability Discrimination Act together with the first level of the Equality Standards, the Council has updated its Equal Opportunities Policy and is ensuring delivery of the Corporate Equality Plan by including issues of equality in all service Business Plans/Action Plans.
- 4.3 With regard to Council buildings and their accessibility, there is currently a budget of £150,000 per annum to ensure that the Council complies with requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. Although the 'Document M' standard would ensure that any new buildings complied with the Act, the Panel was informed that it would prove more difficult to adapt older authority owned buildings.
- 4.4 The Panel received the following responses to recommendations contained in its report.

**Recommendation 5(a)**

**The Council should take action to eliminate the perception of disabled people that it gives low priority to their issues.**

**It is recommended that, as part of the staff training programme, staff are made aware of appropriate etiquette when dealing with disabled people and matters that affect them. Such training would:**

- (i) Raise the awareness of issues affecting disabled people amongst Council employees.**
- (ii) Ensure that the Council's genuine concern and intent to help disabled people is better understood by all the population of Tameside.**
- (iii) Help create an environment where the Council is seeking to understand issues raised to prevent misunderstanding, poor prioritization or even provision of unwanted facilities.**
- (iv) Provide information on the legislation around disabled peoples' issues.**
- (v) Improve networking with other providers, organisations and private sector, in the general area of disabilities and exclusion.**

**Action Taken**

**District Assemblies** - Via the annual EDR process, all staff are briefed on issues relating to customer care, equal opportunities and disability. Such issues are also raised and investigated as part of the recruitment and selection of new staff and also form part of the induction process. Key issues and development are also discussed at regular team briefing sessions.

**Engineering** - Staff training compiled.

**Corporate** - Recommendations 5 (a), (b), (c), (d), (g), (h) and (k) are wholly, or in part, of a corporate/strategic nature, and, as such the council is currently identifying a nominated officer within the Corporate Policy Unit to take the lead on "Disability Issues", a role which will also take on board the corporate recommendations emanating from the recent SSI Inspection of Services for People with a Disability. This forms part of the Council's overall approach to responding to "Equalities Issues" as part of our Social Inclusion and Community Cohesion agendas, which have recently been reviewed in the light of the Ritchie Report.

**Comments Submitted at the Meeting:-** Consideration was currently being given to accessibility to District Assemblies which, it was reported, needed to be reviewed and enhanced. The Panel was informed that

consideration was given to facilities for disabled people in relation to all new engineering schemes, in line with national guidance. Engineering Services have also established an equalities champion. Access to Council services had been identified as a major issue for people who required specialist support as not all people with a disability accessed Social Services.

4.4.2

#### **Recommendation 5(b)**

**Although the Council devotes considerable resources on facilities and services for disabled people in town centres there was still a need for an overall co-ordinated approach across service areas.**

**District Assemblies** - From a District Assembly perspective, co-ordination of services is occurring at a local level. The whole remit of Town Managers is to bring together various service providers and local interest groups to ensure that any work or project delivered at local level is joined up. A good example of this is the current re-design of Denton Town Centre which involves a project group comprising a multi-disciplinary team of officers working together. The consultation exercise going on as part of that work has encompassed the views of disabled people and we hope to deliver a project that specifically takes on board the comments received.

**Engineering** - The Engineering Service will be developing, with the District Assemblies over the forthcoming year, a network management and strategic delivery approach to service delivery. As a part of this approach regular consultations with representatives of the disabled community will feature. These stated aims feature in the Engineering Service Business Plan for 2003/2004.

Web front end brings together information of facilities which assist the disabled and mobility impaired. The Engineering Service contributes to these pages.

**Corporate** - See response to Recommendation 5(a).

**Additional Comments Received** - Following the production of the Denton Town Centre Development and Design Framework, the Council is taking on board one of the key recommendations to produce a Public Realm Improvements Strategy with the aim being to ensure a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to public realm improvements within the Town Centre area.

Public Realm in this instance was taken to mean all aspects of open space between buildings and included

- Roads, paving and surfacing
- Boundary treatment
- Street furniture (seating, bollards, bins, lighting and sewage)
- Planting
- Public Art

Specific consultations have taken place with wheelchair users, based upon a fact-finding tour, leading to access improvements into the Town Centre. The designs of road crossings have been amended to ensure more user-friendly access.

Through the auspices of the Tameside Forum for Disabled People, a tour of the Town Centre is being arranged specifically for disabled people. Their views will be incorporated into the Improvement Strategy which will form guidance for the future design and treatment of the Public Realm areas.

#### 4.4.3

##### **Recommendation 5(c)**

**It is recommended that a Strategic Director be specifically designated as the Lead Officer for issues concerning disabled people with responsibility to co-ordinate all resources and projects being implemented with regard to disability issues. This role (which in part is the current responsibility of Social Services) needs to be implemented through all Council services streams.**

##### **Action Taken**

**District Assemblies** - This recommendation would be supported and it is felt that it can only assist in this important area of work.

**Corporate** - See response for Recommendation 5(a)

**Comments Submitted at the Meeting:-** The Strategic Director, Social Services was to be appointed as lead Strategic Director to champion equalities issues.

#### 4.4.4

##### **Recommendation 5 (d)**

**It is recommended that policies clearly recognise the different responsibilities of Social Services to individuals and the separate responsibility of the Authority to provide services as a whole to this section of the community, thus reducing any exclusion.**

##### **Action Taken**

**Social Services** - This recommendation has a Social Services specific element (as well as corporate/strategic elements). A Corporate Equalities Champions Group has been established, chaired by Councillor M Sidebottom, which clearly recognises that the Equalities Agenda (including disabilities) is a corporate issue.

The responsibility of Social Services to assess the needs of Tameside residents remains the same (Community Care Act 1990 – Section 4.2). The response/responsibilities of Social Services are clarified in Eligibility Criteria and the Thresholds to Service Access.

**Corporate** - For response see recommendation 5(a)

#### 4.4.5

##### Recommendation 5 (e)

**It is recommended that consideration be given to the provision of street furniture and facilities, such as seating which is easier for disabled people to use. In addition issues relating to access and the clearing of obstructed footways etc., should be addressed.**

##### Action Taken

**Engineering** - As part of the Corporate approach to remove street clutter and obstructions, attention will be given to the difficulties experienced by the disabled community. This will be achieved as part of the consultation described against recommendation 5(b).

Consideration of the need of disabled people is given by Engineers for street furniture /signal crossings etc as part of the Engineering Design process.

**Comments submitted at the meeting:** Issues regarding street furniture can be brought to the attention of District Assemblies via advisory group members.

#### 4.4.6

##### Recommendation 5 (f)

**It is recommended that consideration be given to the key fob parking scheme for disabled people at the side of the Town Hall, Ashton-under-Lyne and regarding the £20.00 payment as a deposit, returnable if the key fob is returned in good order.**

##### Action Taken

**Engineering** - This project had been completed with works undertaken by Engineering Services and scheme managed by Social Services.

**Social Services** - A key fob policy/criteria is in place and currently under review as part of a Social Services review of "front door" function.

**Comments submitted at the meeting:** In addition to the key fob scheme the "blue badge" scheme is in operation. Currently the issue of key fob abusers is being addressed with a possibility of abusers' key fobs being cancelled and their £20.00 deposits returned.

#### 4.4.7

##### Recommendation 5 (g)

**It is recommended that budgets that include funding for the provision of facilities for disabled people be properly identified, co-ordinated and monitored, to ensure that there were no areas of duplication or waste.**

##### Action Taken

**District Assemblies** - While not disagreeing with the sentiments expressed, it is pointed out that no specific budget for disabled facilities currently exists at District Assembly level.

**Engineering** - Small budget established in Engineers Capital programme 2002/03 (also proposed 2003/04 – other funding is made available through the utilisation of general budget heads e.g. signal upgrading, transportation projects etc. The proposals for network management detailed in recommendation 5 (b) will endeavour to remove duplication and increase economies of scale benefits through a strategic approach to highway project work.

**Corporate** - See response for recommendation 5 (a).

#### 4.4.8

##### **Recommendation 5 (h)**

**It is recommended that business plans should reflect all resources available for facilities and services for disabled persons and link capital projects such as pedestrian schemes, bus station.**

##### **Action Taken**

**Engineering** - The Engineering Service Business Plan details the approach to be adopted in the design and implementation of project work so that facilities and services for the disabled are included as an integral part of the solution.

Off-street parking facilities are provided (wide bay dedicated parking spaces free to blue badge holders).

**Corporate** - See response for recommendation 5 (a).

**Comments submitted at the meeting:** The Panel heard that business plans do reflect resources available for facilities and services for disabled persons and that Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive adhere to national guidelines for accessibility for capital projects.

#### 4.4.9

##### **Recommendation 5 (i)**

**It is recommended that District Assemblies include representatives of disabled persons' organisations be included in the membership of Advisory Groups and District Assemblies.**

##### **Action Taken**

**District Assemblies** - There is currently some representation on both District Assemblies and District Assembly Advisory Groups by disabled people, it is agreed that this could be improved. It is also pointed out that the appointment of people to Advisory Groups is actually driven by Democratic Services who may well be able to provide further comment on this matter.

**Comments received at the meeting :-** The membership of Advisory Groups would be reviewed and the role enhanced.

**Additional Comments Received** - Following advertisement, Advisory Group representatives are appointed for a two year period, the current term of office being May 2002 – April 2004. A pre requirement of applying for membership as an Advisory Group member is that the individual represents a local community/voluntary organisation in the District Assembly area. Borough wide organisations are excluded from applying and as a consequence, most disabled groups (such as Tameside Deaf Group and the Access Group) are unable to apply for membership to the Advisory Group.

#### 4.4.10

#### **Recommendation 5 (j)**

**It is recommended that a guide be published for disabled people and those providing support or services for disabled people. Such guides are published in other authorities and are well received.**

#### **Action Taken**

**Social Services** - Social Services currently have in place the undermentioned comprehensive guides:

- Visual Improvement Services
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services
- Information Directories for Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Visual Impairment.

On contacting Social Services, pertinent information is sent to potential service users/carers in a personalised pack. The Social Services Information Strategy for 2003/04 has the development of a directory of services for disabled people as a priority. This will include services other than just Social Services.

**Comments submitted at the meeting:** The Council currently publishes a disabled persons' access guide via the Council web site. Some concern was expressed however, that many disabled people would not have access to the Council's website and could not therefore benefit from the guide.

#### 4.4.11

#### **Recommendation 5 (k)**

**It is recommended that consideration be given to the authority lobbying for the alteration of legislation and services specified by Central Government, which are not in the best interest of disabled people, such as funding, RADAR and similar schemes, some planning and building controls.**

#### **Action Taken**

**Corporate** - See Response to recommendation 5 (a).

#### 4.4.12

#### **Recommendation 5 (I)**

**It is recommended that difficult and possibly emotive issues such as the withdrawal of badges due to misuse be given consideration.**

#### **Action Taken**

**Social Services** - Badge misuse is an emotive issue, and whilst Social Services have tightened criteria for issue, we have insufficient resources to monitor badge misuse. Perhaps this is a potential function for Tameside Patrollers.

### **5.**

#### **ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### 5.1

It is recommended that consideration be given to better enforcement of retail outlets obstructing pavements with the placement of advertisement boards. In particular, although it is understood that the Tameside Patrollers have no enforcement powers, it is recommended that they use their influence to inform shopkeepers and traders of the need not to obstruct footways.

#### 5.2

It is recommended that disabled persons be involved in the training of Council frontline staff in order to ensure efficient communication and understanding of the needs of disabled people.

#### 5.3

That consideration be given to the increased involvement at an early stage of disabled people and their organisations in the planning and major town centre developments and facilities, as correctly being done in Denton with the Tameside Forum for Disabled People.

#### 5.4

That consideration be given to innovative ways of proactively involving disabled people in District Assemblies.

#### 5.5

That the Council's Access Guide for Disabled People be also provided in hard copy format and made available through groups for disabled people and other sources such as public buildings, doctors surgeries etc.

#### 5.6

That consideration be given to ways in which the Tameside Patrollers be involved in the monitoring and reporting of blue badge scheme misuse.