

**Accessibility to the Council's 'Public Buildings' – current position**

For the 2005/06 financial year return, the Council reported that 31.63% (i.e. 31 out of 98) of its public buildings falling within the definition of Best Value Performance Indicator 156 were 'accessible and suitable' as defined in Approved Document M of the Building Regulations Act 1991. The 2005/06 out-turn compares with a target for that year of 52.00%. The 2004/05 out-turn was 26.00% against a target of 20.00%. A copy of the schedule of buildings that supported the 2005/06 return is **appended**.

BV PI 156 relates to the percentage of authority buildings open to the public in which all public areas are suitable for, and accessible to, disabled people. 'Public areas' means those parts of such buildings where such services are provided, including access to those areas from the public thoroughfare or on-site parking. For a building or part of a building to be 'open to the public' individual residents must be able to choose on a day-to-day basis whether to use the services provided within the building. The buildings that are specifically excluded from the BVPI definition are:

- Schools and similar educational establishments even if used for other purposes as well;
- Registry offices (where the Registrar is not a local authority employee);
- Stand-alone public toilets;
- Commercially leased premises;
- Those let to other bodies not providing a service for the authority; and
- Social services establishments in NHS buildings that primarily serve NHS clients.

**Survey of the Council's Public Buildings**

In 2006/07 Corporate Property Services commissioned Access Audits for all of its outstanding Public Buildings; this included those falling within the definitions of BV PI 156 and/or a Shaping Future Services 'Existing Access Point'. CPS is currently analysing the results and the survey findings and recommendations (including indicative costs) will be reported to the next meeting of the Access Scrutiny Panel. The Access Audits have been undertaken in consideration of the current requirements of the Building Regulations (i.e. 2004 Edition of Approved Document M). There is a possibility that although some buildings were previously reported as being compliant with earlier versions of Approved Document M, they may not now be compliant with the current version (2004), in which case further improvement works will be identified.

Bolton at Home is currently reviewing access to the public buildings (approximately 23) that it provides services from and access audits are to be commissioned for any outstanding properties in the near future, the results of which will be tabled at a future meeting of the Access Scrutiny Panel.

## **Arrangements and programme to improve physical access to Public Buildings**

Prior to the introduction of the SFS Access Points Programme, Access Audits were prioritised for those public buildings with the highest footfall (31 Nr) and DDA improvement works were then targeted at Priority Categories 1 (i.e. immediate or urgent) and 2 (i.e. as soon as possible but before October 2004). The Access Points and Access Channels programmes within the Council's Shaping Future Services/Change Programme are currently the key drivers to improving access to Council Services for all its customers, including those with a disability. In 2005/06 the Council's public buildings that fall within its definition of an 'existing Access Point' resulted in 81 buildings being listed (**Appended**), albeit that a number of these buildings (e.g. schools) actually fall outside the definition of BV PI 156. Members should note that some buildings fall within the definition of BVPI 156 but have not been defined as an existing Access Point (e.g. Lillian Hamer EPH).

The Access Points Programme is currently the primary vehicle within the Council to improve physical access to its public buildings. In consultation with the Access Points Programme Board, future targets have been set for BV PI 156 as follows: 2006/07 (45.00%), 2007/08 (55.00%) and 2007/08 (65.00%). The Council and its partners have yet to determine those Access Points it wishes to retain for future service delivery. This has meant that that any further investment in these buildings, which is required to improve accessibility in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act, has been temporarily delayed. The Council will need to review its priorities and consider directing funding for DDA improvement works to those public buildings it intends to retain as part of its future portfolio. It is envisaged that over the life of the Access Points Programme, a number of the existing Access Points may become surplus to requirements; any investment will need to be carefully considered in the context of the likely remaining operational life of these buildings.

Any new buildings procured by the Council are automatically considered in respect of access requirements in accordance with the Building Regulations applicable at the time.