

Bolton Council

Report to: Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee

Date: 15th October 2007

Report of: Director of Corporate Resources **Report No:**

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Report Title: **Recommendations from the Access to Council Services Scrutiny Panel – Progress report and response**

Confidential / Non Confidential

This report does **not** contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public

Purpose:

To respond to the recommendations from the Access to Council Services Scrutiny Panel.

Recommendations:

The Members are asked to consider the responses to the findings and recommendations of the Access to Council Services Scrutiny Panel and to note the progress made by the Council to date in delivering improved access to services.

Decision:

Background Doc(s):

1. Report to the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee - Findings of the Access to Council Services Scrutiny Panel (Dated 02/04/07)

Summary:

The Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee on 3 July 2006 decided to establish an Access to Council Services Scrutiny Panel to examine access for people with a disability to Council services; and in the light of recent Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requirements, the accessibility of Council buildings.

The Panel's investigations took place between August 2006 and April 2007. In April 2007, the Panel made 16 recommendations which were included in a report to the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee on 2 April 2007. These recommendations were grouped under five headings; Strategic, Buildings and Access Audits, Bolton One Stop Shop and Public Access Points, Communications and Parking.

This report details the responses to the Panel's 16 recommendations and describes what actions and improvements have been delivered by the council (since the Panel's final report) to improve access to council services. The report also highlights the further access improvement opportunities that the council is progressing.

Financial impact:

The report is wide ranging. The majority of resources deployed are within existing budgets but there are particular areas where further resource bids are being made as part of the Council's Corporate Business Planning Process, particularly additional bids for capital programme funding to enable further adaptations etc to buildings. These together with Revenue budgets are being considered over the next few months as part of the wider budget discussions and decisions by Members.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee on 3 July 2006 decided to establish an Access to Council Services Scrutiny Panel to examine access for people with a disability to Council services; and in the light of recent Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requirements, the accessibility of Council buildings.
- 1.2 Amongst its requirements, the DDA 2005 extended the duty of the public sector to make adjustments to policies, practices, procedures, and physical features so that disabled people do not face unreasonable difficulties in receiving any benefit conferred by a function of the council or face a worse experience due to any detriment conferred. This duty came into force on the 4th December 2006.

In view of the requirements of the DDA 2005, the Panel was established to examine the council's position in meeting the access to building requirements of the Act, to suggest potential improvements to the council's arrangements to comply with the Act, and to review any alternative arrangements or methods by which the council's services were made accessible to disabled people for instances when council buildings were not accessible.

The DDA 1995 made it unlawful to discriminate against a disabled person in relation to the provision of goods, facilities and services. Service providers, such as local authorities, were placed under a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people so that they did not face difficulties with access to services. The DDA 2005 extended discrimination law against disabled people to almost all the activities of the public sector and created a new duty for public authorities to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people.

- 1.3 The Panel's investigations took place between August 2006 and April 2007. In April 2007, the Panel made 16 recommendations which were included in a report to the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee on 2 April 2007. These recommendations were grouped under five headings; Strategic, Buildings and Access Audits, Bolton One Stop Shop and Public Access Points, Communications and Parking. The Committee requested that the Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance and the Executive Member for Human Resources, Performance and Diversity prepare a report setting out their response to the recommendations from the Access to Council Services Scrutiny Panel; and present these responses back to the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee within six months. This report sets out the proposed responses to the recommendations.

2. RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Strategic

2.1.1 Recommendation 1:

Full text of Recommendation 1: *Given that Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) legislation is concerned about access to services and not access to buildings, ensure that DDA requirements, in addition to performance indicators such as BVPI 156, drive accessibility arrangements for the council's buildings. The Panel received evidence that to improve the accessibility of the council's buildings and in consultation with the Access Points Programme*

Board, annual BVPI 156 targets had been set until 2007/08. Whilst acknowledging the advisability of such targets, the Panel was concerned that a number of existing Access Points fell outside the definition of BVPI 156 (including all schools and similar educational establishments, even if used for other purposes). The Panel felt that BVPI 156 should not be the main device driving accessibility arrangements for council buildings. The reports the Panel received which contained the relevant details on BVPI 156 and the council's Access Points programme is attached as Appendices Two and Three.

Response to Recommendation 1: At the end of 2006/07 the Council had completed access audits for 94% of its public buildings (equivalent to 98% of the public buildings portfolio by GIA sq m) and has set a target to complete the outstanding audits by the end of March 2008.

The council's submission for BVPI 156 for 2006/07 reported that 36.36% (in accordance with the 1991 Version of Approved Document M of the Building Regulations) of its public buildings falling within the definition were suitable for and accessible to people with a disability. The council's submission for 2005/06 for this BVPI was 31.63%. Milestone targets for this BVPI for 2007/08 have been incorporated within Corporate Property Services' Service Improvement Action Plan (ref. CPS SIAP Task CR480), with a view to achieving a target of 50.00% by the end of the current financial year.

Review work undertaken over the last year has identified a total of 122 council public buildings (excluding schools), although it should be noted that approximately 21 of these fall outside the Government's definition for BVPI 156.

The required DDA improvements to those public buildings that fall outside a) the council's definition of an existing Access Point and b) the Government's definition of BVPI 156, are being managed by Corporate Property Services and improvements prioritised and implemented in consultation with service departments. A number of DDA improvement works have been commissioned since the Panel's 2/04/07 report (refer to Section 2.2.2 below).

Whilst the council is committed to making its buildings fully accessible it is constrained (to an extent) by historic buildings, in particular those with listed status. In some cases it isn't possible to make these buildings fully DDA compliant (although management plans will ensure that customers will still have access to council services).

2.1.2 Recommendation 2:

Full text of Recommendation 2: *Examine whether the current practice, whereby each Council service evaluates and prioritises its duty to make adjustments for disabled people, can be improved. The Panel learnt that issues of access were dealt with on a service-by-service basis as part of the Council's relevance review process. The Panel suggested the value of introducing a mechanism to ensure that the approach of each Council service/department was standardised. Although the Panel did not receive any evidence suggesting Council services were adopting different approaches to the disabilities equalities' agenda, the Panel felt action should be taken to ensure any such possibility could be reduced further. Likewise, the Panel also identified the possible merit of the*

Equality Impact Assessments undertaken annually by each Council department (as part of the National Equality Standard framework) being subject to performance monitoring by Councillors.

This recommendation falls into two parts; Relevance Reviews and Equality Impact Assessments.

Response to Recommendation 2:

a) Relevance Reviews

The Relevance Review process is embedded into the work of the Council and its Corporate Business Planning Process. Relevance Reviews are conducted annually. Mechanisms are already in place to ensure that the approach of each service/department to Relevance Reviews is consistent:

Relevance Reviews are conducted by using two standard pro-formas:

- The Service Area Relevance Review - completed by all service areas within the Council.
- The Divisional Summary Relevance Review - used to collate the results and actions from all the Service Area Relevance Reviews into a more strategic document. This can then be used to clearly articulate action and targets for use in Divisional Service Improvement Action Plans (SIAPs), or equivalent document.

Comprehensive guidance is available when conducting relevance reviews; including:

- Relevance Review Guidance; which takes a manager through the process step by step; and includes a section of Frequently Asked Questions.
- Impact Assessment Toolkit Companion; which outlines equalities legislation and key questions for a manager to consider when assessing impact on all our priority groups, including disabled people.
- Relevance Review Toolkit Companion Scoring Grid; which helps a manager to determine how relevant their service is to equality, including disabled people.

Relevance Review pro-formas and guidance material are regularly updated to meet the requirements of new legislation.

The Service Area Relevance Reviews are signed off by the Departmental Equalities Lead Officer; and the Divisional Relevance Reviews are signed off by the Assistant Director and the Departmental Equalities Lead Officer. This provides a quality assurance check and helps ensure consistency across departments.

The route to provide further information for managers is training. At present it is a departmental responsibility to ensure that SIAP managers are fully aware of the detail of the issues for any of our priority social groups, including disabled people.

Clearly it is important that all departments are training to a common script. The Fairness Team is currently working with COD to strengthen our training around disability awareness and this issue is included in this refresh.

b) Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

The second part of the recommendation asks about the possible merit of the EIAs undertaken annually by each Council department (as part of the National Equality Standard framework) being subject to performance monitoring by Councillors. EIAs are not an annual exercise – they are produced as required to accompany reports going before Members for a decision. This means that scrutinising EIAs is already a Member responsibility. The only connection with the National Equality Standard is that it requires us to conduct them. This existing role of Members can be reinforced through the Members Training & Development Programme.

2.1.3 Recommendation 3

Full Text of Recommendation 3: *Investigate the degree to which the Council's access policy is promoted and whether this promotion is itself integral to the policy. The Panel became aware that the Council's access policy might not have been publicised and promoted as widely as possible. In the light of the Council's obligations under the Disability Equality Duty, the Panel felt that promotion of the Council's access policy was elemental to the policy itself. With promotion of the policy in mind, the Panel suggested the skills of the Communications and Marketing Agency be exploited.*

Response to Recommendation 3: At the Panel's meeting on 18 October the Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report to the Panel which clarified the position regarding the Council's Access Policy and contained a list of potential witnesses. The Council's Comprehensive Equality Policy (CEP) which includes a section on Access to Information, Services and Council Premises and our Valuing Diversity Disability Strategy Statement set out the Council's undertakings to improve access by both staff and customers. The Fairness Team provides advice to managers and staff on access issues and signposts enquiries to relevant Council services and other agencies where specific expertise is required. However, the report suggested that these sources of advice might be supplemented by written advice to guide staff in terms of dealing with access issues. Work is in hand in the Fairness Team to produce a formal Advice Note.

2.1.4 Recommendation 4

Full text of Recommendation 4: *Ensure public services are sited on an accessible ground floor wherever possible.* From the outset of the review Panel members suggested the probable value and significance of siting services on an accessible ground floor. During its review the Panel received evidence that the restricted access to the upper floors of Bolton Town Hall was an issue pointed out during the council's disability consultation. The details of the council's disability consultation considered by the Panel are contained within Appendix Five.

Response to Recommendation 4: There are further opportunities to relocate public facing services at Ground Floor level within Bolton Town Hall (e.g. Planning Control Reception). The Access Points Core Offer has established a key requirement in respect of the accessibility of public reception points within buildings.

There is a firm commitment with the Council's Access Strategy to reduce the number of reception points across the Council and in particular within the town centre municipal offices. This is being undertaken in accordance with the Access Bolton Phasing Plan which will see all service areas integrated within the main Centre over the next five years.

2.1.5 Recommendation 5

Full Text of Recommendation 5: *Ensure service managers who control buildings undertake DDA refresher training and that any self-audit of their procedures is reviewed centrally.* The Panel was informed that buildings managers received disability discrimination training but given the requirements of recent legislation the Panel suggested refresher training be prescribed. For similar reasons the Panel recommended that the annual self-audits of procedure conducted by buildings managers be reviewed centrally.

Response to Recommendation 5: The suggestion for refresher training is welcome. Resources to support such a programme will always be an issue but the costs need not be large - the number of officers who control buildings is currently unknown but cannot be very great. As previously mentioned, the Fairness Team is currently working with Corporate Organisational Development in order to strengthen disability training; and this could be incorporated into any refreshment of current training, or into any additional training programme to be planned.

We need to ensure that annual self-audits are carried out to a high standard. Consistency could also be achieved by the inclusion of this subject specifically within the advice note described in Section 2.1.3 above.

2.1.6 Recommendation 6

Full Text of Recommendation 6: *Examine whether it is possible to anticipate building access regulations for when new council buildings are approved.* The Panel became aware of the value of exceeding current building regulations in anticipation of an increase in future building standards. The Panel received evidence, detailed within Appendix Three attached to this report, that a small number of relatively new council buildings (for example, Leverhulme Park Community Centre) had been designed in accordance with the 1999 version of the

Building Regulations and that the requirements of subsequent regulations meant that the council now faced costs to implement DDA works.

Response to Recommendation 6: New council buildings are designed in accordance with the versions of the Building Regulations that are current at the time of design and procurement. Where Corporate Property Services is aware of pending changes in building access legislation it will ensure that the requirements are incorporated within design proposals and that buildings will be 'future proofed' as far as it is reasonably practicable to do so and where expenditure budgets permit.

The Access Points Core Offer has established a requirement that space within access points will need to be flexible to reflect change in the need of the local population. Flexible space is a generic ethos and to define what flexibility might look like for each access point would be difficult. Flexibility may be built into an Access Point facility in a number of ways, for example:

- Partition walls (flexible interior space)
- Modular building (allowing rooms to be 'added on' easily at a later date)
- Wireless ICT technology

2.1.7 Recommendation 7

Full text of Recommendation 7: *Investigate whether, in cases concerning the access needs of citizens, it is possible to store and/or pass relevant information between council departments.* Following its visit to the Bolton One Stop Shop and Call Centre the Panel requested information relating to the recording and collation of knowledge gathered through the operation of the One Stop Shop. The resultant report is attached as Appendix Six. The Panel suggested the value to disabled people of an arrangement to transfer information about access requirements across the authority. Such a co-ordinating system would avert a need for people to repeat information to a number of different (or even same) departments and help ensure disabled people consistently received information in appropriate formats. The Panel recognised that any such storage and passing of information must be in accordance with information related legislation, but were made aware that a recent report by Sir David Varney, *Service Transformation: a Better Service for Citizens and Businesses, a Better Deal for Taxpayers*, contained relevant advice.

Response to Recommendation 7: Knowledge and information concerning citizens is captured within the Customer Relationship Management system. This system is being developed under the Knowledge and Information Management programme (KIM) to form a single view of all the Council's customers so information can be easily shared, our services can be tailored appropriately and customer intelligence can be used to shape and improve services. All relevant guidance is being used to inform this work.

In addition, a customer intelligence working group is now in existence to share best practice and look at more effective ways of collating, sharing and using customer intelligence.

This recommendation is being considered in more detail as part of the council's Access Points Programme and will need to reflect citizen's access needs across not only council departments, but also partner organisations.

2.2 Buildings and Access Audits

2.2.1 Recommendation 8

Full text of Recommendation 8: *Ensure that access audits are undertaken of those council buildings in multiple-occupation with common areas, that is to say, where the council has management responsibilities for common areas. The Panel was made aware that in relation to the respective DDA requirements for landlords and tenants, the council when acting as the "service provider" had responsibility for compliance. The full report clarifying the duties of the DDA for landlords and/or tenants is attached as Appendix Seven. However, the Panel learnt that access audits were in the process of being commissioned for the small number of such buildings. The Panel suggested that the Executive Member address the issue of recovering the resulting costs of DDA compliance from tenants whenever possible. Evidence had been presented to the Panel indicating that voluntary sector tenants might struggle to meet such charges.*

Response to Recommendation 8: Access Audits have been commissioned by Corporate Property Services for those council buildings in multiple-occupation with common areas.

2.2.2 Recommendation 9

Full text of Recommendation 9: *Review access arrangements in council buildings and introduce appropriate improvements. The Panel felt, and was supported in this view by evidence it received from the council's disability consultation, that the accessibility of some council buildings could be enhanced. For example, by making wheelchairs available for people requiring them for travelling some distance within council buildings, installing better signage for disabled toilets, and examining the value of an operator for the lift in the north entrance of Bolton Town Hall during busy periods or events.*

Response to Recommendation 9:

- Bolton Town Hall position update – Corporate Property Services has commissioned and deployed new Fire Evacuation Chairs throughout the building. A new wheelchair platform lift has been commissioned to replace existing equipment within the Ground Floor lobby area of the North Entrance and is scheduled to be completed in October 2007. Improvements have been undertaken to the South Entrance to meet the specific needs of a disabled member of staff.
- Horwich Town Hall – a stair lift has been recently installed to improve access to the First Floor Town Council Chamber.
- The required access improvements have been commissioned/programmed to be completed by the end of September for the following buildings:-

- Hibbert Street Community Centre
 - Horwich Resource Centre
 - Horwich Youth Centre
- Bolton Central Library and Museum – a decision was taken in consultation with the Access Points Programme Board to replace the existing wheelchair ramp to the main entrance (which is not compliant with the current version of Building Regulations Approved Document M) and the work was commissioned in July 2007.

2.2.3 Recommendation 10

Full text of Recommendation 10: *Ensure that Bolton at Home, in accordance with the council's management agreement, comply with DDA legislation. The Panel learnt that if Bolton at Home buildings did not comply with DDA requirements then the council, rather than Bolton at Home, would be liable legally. The Panel received evidence dating from 2005 confirming that Bolton at Home's area offices conformed to disability discrimination requirements, and was informed that DDA compliance reviews would be completed by April 2007.*

Response to Recommendation 10: Bolton at Home, as a member of the council's Access Points Programme Board are actively involved in the council's strategic programme to review its existing Access Points. Bolton at Home are currently exploring options to procure the outstanding access audits and these have now been targeted to be completed by the end of the current financial year.

2.3 Bolton One Stop Shop and Public Access Points

2.3.1 Recommendation 11

Full text of Recommendation 11: *Consider the introduction of priority assistance in the Bolton One Stop Shop to reduce waiting times for people with disabilities. The Panel felt that the duties of all security officers allocated to the One Stop Shop should include providing assistance to disabled people and that signage should make clear such a service was available. The Panel was informed that similar services for disabled people were intended to help alleviate pain or discomfort while waiting, and had been recognised as best practice among councils awarded Beacon status for accessible services. The summary of the best practice of the four councils awarded Beacon status for accessible services is attached as Appendix Ten to this report.*

Response to Recommendation 11: Services for disabled people are tailored appropriately within the One Stop Shop with the use of appointments and private interview facilities to minimise wait times and maximise levels of comfort. The Disabled Parking Service has recently been integrated within the One Stop Shop and given it's own area so wait times are kept to a minimum and seating is provided close by.

In addition, the service has committed to investigating services offered by Beacon Council's as part of this years Valuing Diversity plan to provide learning and help us to improve the service we offer.

2.3.2 Recommendation 12

Full text of Recommendation 12: Consider exploiting mystery shopping methods to measure and monitor improvements to access. *The Panel acknowledged the value of the current methods of consultation used to inform the operation of the One Stop Shop (that is to say, the annual Corporate Residents' Survey, the Customer Service Division customer satisfaction survey, and input into the Customer Service Division's Service Improvement Action Plan based on summaries of disability consultation provided by the Fairness Team – outlined to the Panel in section 1.2 of Appendix Six of this report) but recognised that these are not aimed specifically at disabled groups or people. The Panel received evidence, referred to in section 2.3 of Appendix Ten, that regular mystery shopping featured in the best practice of at least one of the councils awarded Beacon status for accessible services.*

Response to Recommendation 12: Bolton Council leads the Association (AGMA) One Stop Shop and Contact Centre Benchmarking Group and this group's work plan for this year includes investigating the possibility of providing a reciprocal mystery shopping arrangement between authorities. This is intended to cover accessibility issues and well as the standard of service provided.

2.3.3 Recommendation 13

Full text of Recommendation 13. Consider maximising partnership working. *The Panel were informed of the provision of a Department for Work and Pensions drop in service in Bolton One Stop Shop (included in Appendix Nine to this report). In addition, the Panel received evidence that through access centres best practice councils for Accessible Services had been involved in strategic partnerships with organisations such as the Inland Revenue, Child Support Agency, Citizens Advice Bureau, Benefits Agency, and Age Concern. Evidence of the best practice received by the Panel is appended as Appendix Ten.*

Response to Recommendation 13: The Access Points Programme Board comprises representatives of a number of the council's key partners (e.g. Bolton NHS PCT and Bolton at Home) and the strategic review of the council's Access Points is being undertaken in partnership. Opportunities to improve physical access to buildings and service user access to more joined-up/cross partner service delivery are being actively explored as part of this programme (e.g. with the PCT as part of the Brightmet Primary Care Resource Centre Project).

The council is also working in partnership with the Leisure Management Trust to improve access to the council's leisure centres portfolio and access strategies are being developed for these assets. Turton Leisure Centre is the current pilot scheme and DDA improvement works due to be completed in October 2007, including associated DDA works to Turton High school. In addition Access Strategies have been prepared for four other Leisure Centres (i.e. Ladybridge, Little Lever, Sharples, and Withins).

At present; Registrars, The Pension Service, the Credit Union and the Primary Care Trust all hold regular surgeries within Bolton's One Stop Shop. In the near future Welfare Rights have also committed to providing services. The Customer Services

Division is always looking for opportunities for partner agencies to utilise the facilities.

2.4 Communications

2.4.1 Recommendation 14

Full Text of Recommendation 14: *Acknowledge that all information and public documents should be in accessible formats and seek to improve accessibility of Council documents as necessary. Although outside the practical scope of its review, the Panel felt that any possible reliance on the accessibility of Council documents through the internet deserved investigation. The Panel believed many disabled people might not have access to the Council's website and as a consequence be unable to readily access such publications. The Panel felt that a range of contact choices should remain readily accessible to disabled people in dealings with the Council, including the traditional ones of face to face and telephony with which most people are most comfortable. In addition, the Panel was mindful that the expertise it witnessed by the telephone operators in the Call Centre minimised the need for more costly, face to face contacts.*

Response to Recommendation 14: The Council has operated an in-house interpretation and translation service for some 30 years. The form and nature of this service has evolved over time and the current structure, called the Corporate Language Support Service or CLASS, based in the Fairness Team, includes British Sign Language provision and support over technological aids such as minicomms, induction loops and audio, Braille and large print publication.

The principle of providing all information and public documents in various accessible formats is sound, but the sheer scale of the task of making all Council documents available in various formats in advance of expressed demand makes it a massive resource issue – how do you staff it, judge what take-up will be, calculate amounts of each format to be printed etc. Because of this, the current policy is that we offer alternative formats on request. Indeed, the Fairness Team has included the offer of alternative formats (and asian languages) on our publications for the best part of 10 years. Internet access is available at libraries across the Borough.

2.4.2 Recommendation 15

Full Text of Recommendation 15: *Consider the accessibility of the Comprehensive Equality Policy (CEP) and the Disability Equality Scheme. The Panel received evidence that the Council's Comprehensive Equality Policy, under which the Council's combined equality schemes are published, would ultimately consist of so many documents linked to the core text that it could only exist on the internet. This was disclosed to the Panel in written evidence (reproduced in section 2.6 of the report attached as Appendix Four). Given Recommendation 14, the Panel considered whether the CEP was accessible.*

Response to Recommendation 15: As the recommendation notes, the CEP in its full form will consist of thousands of documents and the only realistic approach is internet publication. As the Council's communications systems move ever-increasingly towards internet access, reflecting the changes that we see in the world around us, the real issue is not hard-copy production but ensuring that internet access is improved, both in terms of:

- people's ability to gain access to the internet, now being addressed through programmes to provide internet access via libraries and access points; and
- the on-screen offering – that is, is the Council's web site accessible in terms of visual impairment, motor impairments and the way it is structured and understood.

Nonetheless, hard copies and alternative media remain important strategies for us. We have now re-published our updated Valuing Diversity Policy and its accompanying Strategies (including Disability) in hard copy as a booklet. This policy is also posted on the CEP on the internet. This booklet is intended for distribution via the usual channels – reception areas, public events etc – and gives a ready means of access to our policies independently of the internet. We offer this booklet, as well as the CEP itself, in alternative formats and give contact details for the Fairness Team.

Anyone who contacts the Team, either directly or via being signposted by the One-Stop Shop is offered documents or texts from the CEP in an appropriate format. This would include the core text of the CEP which describes the principles and sets out the commitments which guide all our valuing diversity work. However, given the low level of demand we usually offer a home visit to explain our approach to fairness and diversity. We find that if someone is really interested it is well worth the effort, since it represents a much higher level of customer service and is in the end far more cost-effective than producing one-off versions of the texts.

2.5 Parking

2.5.1 Recommendation 16

Full text of Recommendation 16: *Consider the merit of disabled badge signage to indicate that disabled spaces are provided in specific car parks.*

The Panel received evidence that car parks near the town centre were popular with disabled people but those further out received less usage. In addition, the Panel viewed evidence from the council's disability consultation (referred to in Appendix Five) indicating that disabled people in Bolton wanted a tightening up of the abuse and misuse of disabled badges.

Response to Recommendation 16: The Council's website lists the number of disabled spaces per car park and also advises that all parking bays can be used free of charge (unlike our competitors) if a Blue Badge is displayed (this applies to the majority of our car parks). Each disabled space is clearly marked in accordance with the access audit. Some of the spaces are currently accompanied by signage, although this is limited due to the current budget constraints.

The Council, together with its partners NCP and the police have recently started to tackle the ongoing problem of Blue Badge misuse and abuse. The operation known as 'Dial' targeted individuals who were known to be persistently depriving disabled people of a parking space. This resulted in excess of 80 offenders being either reported for summons or arrested. The offenders concerned transcended all ages, genders and professions. It would appear, from the information obtained during the operation, that the level of abuse is far more widespread than initially thought. It is therefore proposed that a similar operation should be conducted later this year.

3. Conclusions

This report details the responses to the Panel's 16 recommendations and describes what actions and improvements have been delivered by the council since the Panel's final report to improve access to council services. The report also highlights the further access improvement opportunities that the council is progressing.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 The Executive is asked to consider the responses to the findings and recommendations of the Access to Council Services Scrutiny Panel and to note the progress made by the Council to date in delivering improved access to services.