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## **ACCESS TO COUNCIL SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

**19 SEPTEMBER 2006**

Councillor Brierley

Councillor Mrs. L. Byrne

Councillor Connell

Councillor Hussain (Chair)

Councillor Hayes

Councillor Mrs. Ronson

Steve Arnfield – Director, Corporate Resources

Susan Curran – Deputy Director, Corporate Resources

James Dearling – Senior Democratic Services Officer

Andrew Stephenson – Asset Manager, Corporate Property Services

Councillor Hussain in the Chair

### **4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

### **5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved – That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 21 August 2006, be approved.

### **6 DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT UPDATE**

The Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report to the Panel which addressed matters raised by the Panel at its previous meeting. The report contained gave a brief description of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), an update on progress in meeting the requirements of the Act within the council's buildings, and a summary of the actions taken to provide support for customers with disabilities within the council's One Stop Shop and

Contact Centre.

Following consideration of the report, a number of points were made and clarifications given:

- Panel members recognised that the needs of disabled people differed and the necessity to avoid over-representing the more vocal groups;
- Panel members noted the need for the council to take “reasonable” steps in relation to DDA requirements, to consider the options available and balance the costs incurred and the benefits attained;
- Panel members indicated support for a council-wide strategic approach to disabled access, in preference to the current practise whereby each council service evaluated and prioritised its duty to make adjustments for disabled people;
- Panel members were informed that preparations were ongoing for the publication of the Disability Equality Scheme (to be published by 4 December 2006);
- The value of both high-quality communication and promotion of the council services available to disabled people was indicated. In particular, the worth of determining the degree to which the council’s access policy is promoted and whether this promotion was integral to the policy was highlighted;
- Panel members discussed the merit of introducing improved access arrangements for disabled customers in council buildings (e.g., wheelchairs available for those customers requiring them for

travelling some distance within council buildings), while maintaining the dignity of these customers;

- The merit of ensuring events staged in council buildings are user friendly and that groups who use the council facilities are aware of the services available and the procedures associated with the building was suggested;
- Panel members identified the need to ensure that access and information notices in council buildings were installed in a well-ordered manner;
- In addition to physical changes, Panel members were informed that the Access Audit reports of the council's public buildings would also include recommended changes to management procedures;
- Panel members discussed the likely advantages of service managers who control buildings undertaking annual DDA refresher training and reviewing their procedures, with these audits reviewed centrally;
- Concern was expressed that the DDA requirements should drive accessibility arrangements for the council's buildings, rather than Best Performance Indicator 156;
- Panel members noted the value of ensuring that public services be sited on the ground floor whenever possible; and
- With reference to commercially leased properties,

Panel members raised the question of whether responsibility for meeting DDA requirements lay with tenants or landlords.

Resolved –

(i) That the information relating to Access Audits for council public buildings (i.e., survey findings and recommendations, including indicative costs) be supplied to the next meeting of the Panel;

(ii) That clarification be provided to the Panel concerning the council's Access Policy; and

(iii) That clarification be provided to the Panel concerning the respective DDA requirements for landlords/tenants.

## **7 SCOPING DOCUMENT**

The Panel considered a scoping document to identify the purpose of the review, its timetable, and information and witnesses required.

During the subsequent discussion Panel members indicated that a visit to the council's One Stop Shop to gather evidence on disability access to the council services should be arranged. Members also suggested the Panel's final report should acknowledge the restricted remit of the review and the valuable areas of work omitted unavoidably.

Resolved –

(i) That officers provide a list of potential witnesses to the next meeting of the Panel; and

(ii) That future meetings of the Panel be arranged for 8.30am on 18 October, 9.00am on 9 November, 9.00am on 23 November, and 9.00am on 18 January.