

**DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY
(Report by the Head of Administration)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the outcome of the consultation with District Council Members and Town and Parish Councils on disability access.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members will recall at their meeting held on 7th November 2006 consideration was given to the scope of a study on access for those with disabilities to premises, facilities and other sites in the District, excluding those provided by the District Council. Members subsequently discussed parking on pavements, the installation of dropped kerbs and access to buses as potential areas of investigation. The Panel also highlighted improving enforcement on disabled parking bays, extending the hours bus passes could be used by the disabled, advertising of disabled facilities at leisure centres and advocacy services at Council offices as potential study areas.
- 2.2 The Panel also referred to the benefits of introducing, for Council decisions, a dedicated group of consultees, representing those with learning, physical and sensory impairments, possible opportunities to promote the needs of those with disabilities through the Local Strategic Partnership and the Local Area Agreement and the County Council's role in this area.
- 2.3 The Panel asked that the Town and Parish Councils along with all District Council Members be consulted on a range of matters arising from a study of disability access. A questionnaire was approved by Members on 3rd July 2007 for this purpose. A copy of the questionnaire is attached at Appendix A.

3. RESPONSE RATE

- 3.1 33 responses were received from Town and Parish Councils. This amounts to a 39% response rate, which generally should be regarded as a high rate of return.

4. SURVEY FINDINGS

- 4.1 A comprehensive list of all issues raised from the questionnaire appears in Appendix B. Further analysis now is given to those issues raised and similarities between Councils are highlighted. The main concerns highlighted throughout the responses received are as follows:

Buses

- 4.2 Many of the authorities reported on the infrequency and irregularity of the currently available public transport. It was noted by many that the type of bus provided was ill-equipped to cater for the needs of its

disabled passengers. This lack of transport and access to vehicles such as buses were mentioned by most respondents, reflecting in particular the needs of the rural parishes. It was recommended that more low liner buses should be provided and that the need for appropriate dropped kerbs/pathways leading to buses should be addressed as currently they limited an individual's mobility.

- 4.3 The idea of a disabled bus pass was warmly received; however, concerns regarding the hours in which the holder could use the pass were raised. It was also recorded that there should be a form of carer's bus pass for those who are required to travel with disabled individuals.

Information

- 4.4 It was recorded that the majority of information surrounding the needs and requirements of disabled people was sought directly from disabled people themselves and members of the community in relation to friends or family with a disability. The District Council featured as a useful site for obtaining information; however, some authorities requested access to further information with regard to representation, service planning and the availability of funding. Reference also was made to the potential of a dedicated group of consultees to promote and monitor their needs and formulation of Council policies. Furthermore, the need for education and training for Council employees and associated organisations to improve awareness of disability access was raised.

Funding

- 4.5 Funding and financial support was an issue that seemed to arise from a lack of information and confusion regarding claims. Better communication and flow of information on available funding and facilities for disabled people was a common finding throughout the study.

Parking

- 4.6 Dedicated parking, greater penalties for anti-social parking in disabled (accessible) bays and adjustments to roads and paving were highlighted as a key solutions to many outstanding issues. The majority of authorities reported on the inconvenience of illegal parking in particular outside schools at peak times and local shops and the effect on members of the public in an area.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Members are invited to consider the information presented and identify any matters for future investigation.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Disability Equality Duty Research Findings

Reports and Minutes of meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery)

