

Disability Working Group

Wednesday, 9th April, 2025

MEETING OF DISABILITY WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Brooks (Chairperson); and
Councillors Doherty and Smyth.

In attendance: Mr. R. Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Ms. L. Dennis, Equality and Diversity Officer; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apology

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Abernethy.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th December, 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Sign Language Bill

The Working Group was reminded that a Sign Language Framework had been launched by the Department for Communities which sought to address the historical under-investment in both Irish and British sign language in Northern Ireland. In February, legislation to protect both languages had been introduced to the Assembly and referred to the Committee for Communities for consideration. It was reported that the Council was preparing its response to a 'call for evidence', which would be submitted prior to the closing date of 9th May.

The Working Group welcomed the progress which had been achieved in the introduction of the legislation.

Update on Disability Actions – Delivering an Accessible City for All

The Equality and Diversity Officer reported that work was progressing on the Council's Annual Report to the Equality Commission for 2024/25. The report, she added, was part of the Council's statutory duties and an updated Disability Action Plan was being developed also.

The Working Group noted the following:

- that a report on the Disability Action Plan Annual Report for 2024/25 would be submitted to a future meeting; and
- that a disability scoping exercise had commenced to develop the new Disability Action Plan for 2026 (and onwards) and would be presented to the Working Group prior to the undertaking of a public consultation exercise in the autumn of 2025.

Contract with 'AccessAble' Organisation

The Working Group noted that the Council would be renewing its contract with the 'AccessAble' organisation, which provided support to organisations to support and improve the lives of disabled people across society. The Members noted that the present contract, which would end on 31st March, would be renewed for a further three-year period.

International Day for People with Disabilities - Engagement Evaluation

The Working Group noted the contents of a report, and an associated appendix, which outlined the findings of the evaluation exercise which had been undertaken to coincide with the International Day for People with Disabilities event which had taken place in Belfast City Hall on 3rd December, 2024.

Strategic Roadmap to Delivering an Accessible City by 2035

The Working Group was provided with an update on the work undertaken in respect of the above-mentioned matter. In considering the report, Members suggested, given the importance of the issue, that it would be beneficial if an all-Members' workshop be convened to consider the wider steps that would be involved in delivering an accessible city by 2035. Specifically, that workshop would consider how the Council could work in conjunction with other governmental bodies/agencies to enhance and improve existing projects, particularly those which sought to enhance access to and from, as well as throughout, the city centre.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed to the following:

- that a report outlining an indicative timeline for the undertaking of the associated work and recommendations would be submitted in due course for consideration;
- to invite a representative of the Equality Commission to present on the implementation of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and
- that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee be requested to authorise the holding of an all-Members' workshop to consider in detail the wider implications associated with delivering the strategic roadmap to create an accessible city by 2035.

Chairperson