

Disability Working Group

Tuesday, 24th March, 2026

MEETING OF DISABILITY WORKING GROUP

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

In attendance: Mr. R. Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Ms. L. Wilson, Client Manager (Physical Programmes);
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer; and
Mr. A. McMullan, Member Services and Digital
Support Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of the Alderman Copeland and Councillor Abernethy.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 10th September, 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Disability Action Plan

Mr. Johnston provided the Working Group with an overview of the draft Disability Action Plan 2026-2029. He reminded the Members that the Action Plan would demonstrate the Council's compliance with Section 49A and Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) which placed a duty on designated public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons and to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life.

He reminded the Working Group that the development of the Action Plan was guided by four themes, namely: Leadership, Delivering for our Communities, Knowing our Communities, and Skilled and Diverse Workforce.

Members of the Working Group provided feedback to the officers present, expressing their reservations with the level of ambition demonstrated in the Action Plan, and that they were happy to work with officers to develop this further.

After discussion the Working Group noted the contents of the report and agreed to:

- Defer further consideration of the Action Plan to a future meeting of the Working group, to which all Members of the Council would be invited, in advance of the launch of the public consultation;
- Request that the minutes of the Disability Working Group be placed earlier on the agenda for future meetings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee; and
- Invite Black Moon and Gig Buddies Belfast to a future meeting of the Disability Working Group to provide an update on their work relating to accessibility at events. This invitation would also be extended to relevant officers in the City and Neighbourhood Services and the Property and Project Departments

Strategic Roadmap Update

The Working group considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to set out next steps in the strategic roadmap.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are requested to note the contents of the report.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

Members were updated at a Disability Working Group meeting on 9 April 2025 of the preliminary work in the development of a strategic roadmap for delivering an accessible city for all by 2035. The Disability Working Group provided important insight into their ambitions for an accessible city.

An internal ‘International Day for People with Disabilities’ event was held on 3rd December 2026 at the City Hall which showcased lived experiences from people with disabilities and the work the Council is currently doing to make our services and facilities more accessible and inclusive. At the event, Councillor Brooks, the Chair of the Disability Working Group reaffirmed the Council’s commitment for Belfast to be an accessible city by 2035.

During the last quarter of 2025/26, a draft Disability Action Plan 2026-2029 was developed. A separate report has been submitted to the Members.

A new action measure has been added to the draft Disability Action Plan, highlighting a strategic and

leadership commitment for the Council to commit to the planning, the design process and the implementation for Belfast to become an accessible city for people with disabilities residing, working or visiting Belfast. The performance indicators for this action measure are:

1. Consult with Members, Corporate Management Team, City Partners, disability stakeholders and people with disabilities to host a large event to gather on what an accessible city roadmap would look like.
2. Establish a working group to deliver the planning and design process of the roadmap.
3. A strategic roadmap paper is produced with a costed plan.
4. The implementation of the roadmap to begin.
5. Provide updated reports at quarterly Members Disability Working Group meetings
6. Provide updated reports at Corporate Management Team meetings

In the draft Disability Action Plan 2026-2029, we have other action measures in place which will support the development and implementation of the roadmap including:

1. Complete an Accessibility Audit
2. Carry out a demographic data scoping exercise on people with disabilities residing in Belfast

4.0 Next Steps

The work undertaken to date in the drafting of the new Disability Action Plan, listing strategic action measures will make a significant contribution to what a roadmap towards an accessible city may look like.

Reports will be brought to the Disability Working Group as work progresses with the proposed timeframes for the below steps including action measures listed in the Disability Action Plan.

1. Host a large disability event in 2026/27
2. The completion of an accessibility audit and a demographic data scoping exercise in 2026/27
3. A report to be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources committee to request the authorisation of holding an all-Members workshop to consider in detail the wide implications associated with delivering the

strategic roadmap to create an accessible city by 2035. The workshop would include the following:

- Presentations on the accessibility audit report and the demographic data scoping exercise, providing a summary of the disability landscape in Belfast through council services and partnerships
- Best practice examples of accessibility in other cities
- Identifying gaps and dependencies on the findings presented and agreeing on the vision for an accessible city.

4. A strategy roadmap paper with a costed plan in place by 2028/29.

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

Financial and resource requirements to be provided for a large disability event, an accessibility audit, a demographic scoping exercise and a Members Disability Working Group workshop. There will be both financial and resource implications which will be determined when Members ambitions for an accessible city within the working themes of leadership, partnership and services are further developed.

6.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Implications

The actions outlined in this report are designed to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people.

The Working Group noted the contents of the report.

NI Executive Disability Strategy Response

The Working group considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report

Members are asked to note a response to the Northern Ireland Executive's draft Disability Strategy 2025-2031

2.0 Main report

2.1 The Department for Communities has led the development of the Northern Ireland Executive draft Disability Strategy 2025-2035 on behalf of the Executive and with extensive input from other departments. This is the first 10-year strategy to be developed, and it has been developed in partnership with Deaf and disabled people and their representative organisations. The

Disability Strategy is one of a number of strategies that underpins the Executive's Programme for Government 2024-27.

2.2 The vision of this draft strategy is to make sure Deaf and disabled people are treated fairly and have the same rights as everyone else. The draft strategy has been structured around eight outcomes which will seek to ensure Deaf and disabled people can:

- 1. Effectively exercise their rights and fundamental freedoms and participate in society on an equal basis, free from discrimination.**
- 2. Access built environment, facilities and transport on an equal basis.**
- 3. Access public services, government information and communication on an equal basis.**
- 4. Access and participate in culture, leisure activities and sport on an equal basis.**
- 5. Live independently in the community with choice and control and with a sufficient and sustainable standard of living.**
- 6. Have access to quality health and social care on an equal basis without discrimination.**
- 7. Access and progress within quality employment in an inclusive labour market.**
- 8. Deaf and disabled people and young people can exercise their rights and reach their full educational, social and development potential.**

These strategic outcomes are supported by 58 strategic commitments.

2.3 The Department for Communities has lead responsibility for monitoring and implementation of this strategy and the department will be guided by a Regional Disability Forum. The Council has no input in the implementation of this strategy.

2.4 A public consultation opened for response on 9th December 2025. A response is required by Friday 20th March 2026.

2.5 Comments were received from EDN representatives across all departments, and a response has been drafted, which concludes that the Council strongly agrees with the vision, the eight outcomes and fifty-eight commitments listed in the draft Disability Strategy. The vision, guiding principles and commitments broadly align to Council's own draft Disability Strategy 2026-31.

2.6 The Executive's Disability Strategy Action Plan will detail the individual actions by government departments that will be set out to meet the strategic commitments. The intention is that the action plan will

cover a rolling three-year period which will evolve and develop as work progresses and circumstances change. Given Council's commitment to develop a strategic roadmap to an accessible city by 2035, this may provide scope for the Executive and government departments to work closely with Council to deliver the vision of Belfast as a fully inclusive and accessible city for people with disabilities.

2.7 Next Steps

It is proposed that the draft response will be presented to SP&R for consideration and approval. If approved by SP&R, the draft corporate response will be forwarded on a holding basis, subject to

3.0 Recommendations

The Members to:

1. Note the contents of this report
2. Note the draft response by the Council to the draft Disability Strategy consultation in the appendix.
3. Agree the next steps set out in paragraph 2.7.
4. Note that the corporate response will be considered by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 20th March and forwarded on a holding basis, subject to ratification by the Council, to meet the submission deadline of Friday, 20th March 2026.

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

There will be no financial and resource implications on the Council.

6.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Implications

There are no equality/good relations or rural needs implications arising directly from this report.

The Working Group noted the Council's response to the Northern Ireland Executive's draft Disability Strategy 2025-2026.

Mr. Connelly highlighted that, as the deadline for submissions had already passed, an officer response would be submitted.

Date of Next Meeting

The Chairperson noted that the Working Group was next scheduled to meet on 17th June, 2026. However, it was agreed that that meeting may be brought forward to accommodate further review of the Disability Action Plan.

The Working Group agreed to hold future meetings later in the day to enable more of its membership to attend.

Chairperson