

Disability Working Group

Friday, 14th August, 2026

MEETING OF DISABILITY WORKING GROUP

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

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor;
Mr. R. Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Ms. L. Dennis, Equality and Diversity Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Alderman Copeland and Councillor Brennan.

Election of Chairperson

The Working Group noted that it was required to elect a Chairperson for the coming year.

Moved by Councillor Abernethy,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite, and

Resolved – that Councillor Brooks be elected to serve as Chairperson to the Working Group until the date of the Annual Meeting in June, 2027.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 24th March, 2026 were agreed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Accessible and Inclusive Belfast

The Policy, Research and Compliance Officer provided the Working Group with an update on the revised approach to accessibility and inclusion in Belfast.

He referred the Members to the Disability Action Plan 2026-29 – ‘Accessible and Inclusive Belfast – be part of the conversations’ and explained that it would be delivered through a series of engagement events and tools, combined with formal consultation.

The Equality and Diversity Officer stated that the Disability Advisory Panel and Sign Language Users Forum would be consulted with in relation to the experience of deaf

and disabled people during the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 with a view to informing preparations the 2027 Fleadh and other large-scale events.

She outlined the following four shared outcomes:

- Delivering for our Communities;
- Knowing our Communities;
- Leadership; and
- Diverse and Skilled Workforce.

She referred the Members to the new actions that would be delivered to achieve those outcomes over the following three years and stated that they would be monitored and revised as necessary. He reported that the engagement period would open towards the end of September, 2026 and would run until January, 2027.

Following discussion, the Equality and Diversity Officer advised that she would consider an appropriate format to hold a discussion with all Elected Members with regard to the Disability Action Plan.

The City Solicitor agreed to write to the Departmental Ministers to seek their commitment to the ambition to make Belfast a fully accessible city by 2035 and to consider the appropriate platform within the Council for Living Streets to make representations to.

The Working Group approved the approach taken to 'Accessible and Inclusive Belfast – be part of the conversation' and noted the updated version of the Disability Action Plan.

Sign Language Act Update

The Language Officer provided the Working Group with the background of the Sign Language Act and reported that the Sign Language Act had received Royal Assent on 10th July, 2026.

He explained that Clause 3 of the Sign Language Act required public authorities to take reasonable steps to ensure that information and services provided by the organisation were as accessible to individuals in the deaf community as they were to individuals who were not in the deaf community and should offer or facilitate the use of British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language for the benefit of individuals in the deaf community in accessing information and services provided by the organisation.

He stated that Clause 6 required public authorities to develop sign language action plans and he reported that public authorities were expected to draft a first five-year Sign Language Action Plan from 2027/28, followed by a consecutive three-year Sign Language Action Plans and that a guidance document was currently being developed to support local authorities.

The Working Group noted the report.

Chairperson