

‘An inclusive Covid-19 pandemic response and long-term recovery’

June 2020

This Council commits to delivering a Covid-19 pandemic response and long-term recovery that is inclusive of disabled people and older people. We further commit ourselves to put the resources required behind a further commitment to become a global leader in inclusion and accessibility in the delivery of our previous commitment in the Belfast Agenda to be an accessible for all by 2035 and no one is left behind.

This Council recognises that lockdown has created severe impacts on the day to day lives of many disabled people, older people, and carers, for example, the removal or reduction of access to key services and support for independent living and the impact of self-isolation on health and wellbeing. Social distancing will be with us for the foreseeable future and presents additional and serious challenges that need to be addressed in the measures taken by this Council and other stakeholders.

As we consider how we will reopen our City, we need to ensure that social and physical distancing does not lead to social and physical barriers. This Council believes we need to ensure that our short-term response in the decisions made on measures to adapt to social distancing are taken through direct engagement with disabled people, older people and carers.

This Council also recognises that for many disabled people, older people and carers the ‘old normal’ often did not work for them. We want to ensure that the long-term recovery of Belfast leaves no one behind and to ensure that the ‘new normal’ aspires to address the concerns and lessons of the ‘old normal’. We recommit ourselves to the commitment made in the Belfast Agenda to be an accessible city for all by 2035, and to build back better than there was before in a way that is inclusive, accessible and sustainable.

To achieve these short and long term objectives, this Council believes we need a common, strategic vision of disability-inclusion and accessibility across all of our strategies and plans as we respond and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic through our functions and through our influence with our partners and other stakeholders. We call on Belfast City Council to:

1. Ensure disabled people, older people and carers are consulted as part of the ‘Reopening the City’ strategy and are active participants in the planning and delivery of this strategy, particularly through the Belfast City Council’s Disability Advisory Panel.
2. Create a Reference Group for Disabled People. This will provide a forum for councillors, our Disability Advisory Panel, council officers as well as other relevant stakeholders and experts from time-to-time, to discuss and progress actions on Belfast City Council’s commitment to becoming an accessible city for all by 2035.
3. Create an ‘Access and Inclusion’ senior staff role. This role would act as both an internal focal point for council staff to improve access and inclusion in the delivery of Council services and have a key role in strategic policy making to deliver a common vision of disability inclusion. It would also act as an external point of contact for residents, disabled people and external stakeholders on day-to-day queries on improving access and inclusion in the City, working with external stakeholders to deliver a more inclusive city.
4. Undertake an independent consultation report on models of best practice of accessibility and inclusion from other cities that will provide recommendations on how these could be applied within Belfast through this Council and its NI Executive partners.
5. Develop a strategic roadmap for delivering an accessible city for all by 2035 that leaves no one behind that provides a common strategic vision of disability access and inclusion across all its strategies and plans, and outlines how we will get there.