

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 5 March 2020

Subject: Review of Council’s Processes - Accessibility for Disabled People

Report of: City Solicitor

Summary

This report sets out the intended approach for a review of how the Council engages with disabled residents, to act upon the Council’s previously stated commitment to embed disability inclusion and accessibility considerations in the design and development of Manchester’s capital and public realm projects.

Recommendations

Members are invited to consider and comment on the contents of this report.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city
Embedding effective processes for accessibility for disabled people will ensure that Equality Impact Assessments will recognise that climate change may have differential and unique impacts on disabled people’s communities across the city, for example in terms of poor air quality, more frequent incidences of extreme weather and initiatives to reduce car journeys or the use of plastics.

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city’s economic success	

A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Effective, timely and meaningful engagement with disabled residents through accessibility and disability inclusion being embedded within the Council's processes, is an essential component of ensuring that disabled residents can fully participate in their communities and therefore avail themselves of the same economic, social and cultural opportunities as non-disabled residents.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Manchester has a proud history of championing equality and has been at the forefront of some of the country's most significant diversity-related work for decades. Against this backdrop, the Council has provided strong leadership on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the development and delivery of its functions, to ensure that Manchester's residents benefit from an accessible, appropriate, fair and satisfactory experience of the Council's services.
- 1.2 This report sets out the intended approach to and scope of a range of activities that will act upon the Council's previously stated commitment to embed disability inclusion and access considerations in the design and development of Manchester's capital and public realm projects. The approach will seek to build on the positive and more challenging lessons learned from a number of existing capital and public realm developments, including but not limited to the redevelopment of the Town Hall Complex and the recent Peterloo memorial.
- 1.3 Specifically, the lessons learned that will inform a revised way of working going forward include:
 - 1) That there is a need for a consolidated appreciation of and commitment to embedding disability access, and accessibility more broadly, within the organisation and amongst our commissioned partners (i.e. designers, artists, architects).
 - 2) That access considerations need to feature more robustly in the decision making processes relating to capital and public realm projects; in particular, that projects need to be underpinned by strong, good quality equality analysis.
 - 3) That there are clear benefits of engaging and involving key stakeholder groups, and principally disabled people, in the development of projects that will concern them, at the earliest opportunity and throughout the process.
 - 4) That there is an opportunity to lead in this area, resulting in positive impact for the Council's reputation, by ensuring these measures are well managed; and conversely, recognising the risk of reputational damage when they are not.
 - 5) That financial advantages can be realised by arriving at an outcome that is accessible by design, thereby avoiding more expensive retrofitting costs.
- 1.4 Given the ongoing scale of development within the City, the Council's commitments and ambition set out in Our Manchester Strategy, particularly in relation to inclusive growth, and taking into account the aims of the Our Manchester Disability Plan, it is clear that the demand for a disability inclusive approach to design and development will only increase. Implementing an approach based on the learning above will mean that the Council can be confident that disabled residents are able to fully participate in their

communities and access buildings and the public realm upon the same basis as non-disabled residents

2. Review of Engagement Mechanisms with Disabled Residents

- 2.1 An essential first step in establishing a revised approach to embedding disability inclusion in capital and public realm projects is a review of the Council's current approach, assessing the systems, practices and processes across a range of key Council departments including Capital Programmes, Corporate Estates, Highways, Planning, Housing, Events, Neighbourhoods and Communications.
- 2.2 The review will be jointly led by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team and the Our Manchester Programme Team. This approach ensures that the review can harness resources and expertise in community engagement together with disability equality skills and knowledge.
- 2.3 The methodology for the review aims to adopt a similar approach to that used in the research and engagement that led to the formation of the Our Manchester Disability Plan, namely a focus on 'What Works', 'What Doesn't' and 'What are the Barriers'.
- 2.4 In order to ensure that the review is a transparent, balanced and credible process for all stakeholders, the review team will engage with Council officers, Our Manchester Disability Plan Board representatives and relevant Elected Members, utilising the approach outlined below.

2.5 Stage One – Internal Engagement

- 2.5.1 A series of one to one conversations will be held with senior officers in: Planning, Housing, Capital Programmes, Communications, Corporate Estates, Highways and Events. Discussions will focus on what works well and what doesn't and also identify what are the barriers to engagement e.g. time, costs, knowledge, skills.
- 2.5.2 A further series similarly focused of one to one conversations will take place with other key stakeholders of the Council's Elected Membership, including the Chair of the Planning Committee, the Lead Member for Disability, the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, and the Chair of the Community and Equalities Committee.
- 2.5.3 A survey of Council workforce in key departments will ascertain the level of knowledge and understanding about accessibility amongst officers, to what degree they require that knowledge in order to do their jobs and where they currently obtain expert advice both internally and externally.

2.6 Stage Two - External Research and Engagement

- 2.6.1 An exercise will be conducted to benchmark the approach to and effectiveness of existing models of engagement with disabled people in the Council e.g. Highways, One Town Hall Project.
- 2.6.2 The review team will consider existing Manchester-based research and practice in this area. This will include, but will not be limited to research on disability engagement undertaken by Breakthrough UK in 2016, the engagement work that led to the formation of the Our Manchester Disability Plan and the Disability Design Reference Group, (DDRG) an independent group of disabled people who consult on built environment projects in Manchester, originally working with Transport for Greater Manchester on improvements to the Metrolink service.
- 2.6.3 The review team will also consider disability engagement models used in other core cities.
- 2.6.4 At least one Focus Group will be held with disabled members of the Our Manchester Disability Plan Board and particularly its Access Sub-Group.
- 2.6.5 All of the models and approaches considered and consulted on above will be assessed for their robustness, transparency and applicability for a revised approach to engaging disabled stakeholders in the development of future capital and public realm projects.

2.7 Stage 3 – Inclusive Design Round Table

- 2.7.1 Following the one to one engagement with officers, members and Our Manchester Disability Plan Board, the review team will convene a series of co-design workshops with stakeholders to bring together and share the learning to date from stages one and two of this process, and to pool participants' collective knowledge to develop a set of recommended solutions.
- 2.7.2 These recommendations will then be considered by relevant members of the Council's SMT at an Inclusive Design Round Table, which is to be arranged for October 2020. This will be chaired by the City Solicitor in their capacity of SMT Lead for Equality, and will be facilitated by the Access Consultant for the Town Hall Project and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team
- 2.7.3 The round table discussions will consider the review findings and recommendations, and arrive at decisions based on these, particularly regarding where investment in resources is required to implement solutions. In addition, the round table forum will consider the ambition and scope for a new Inclusive Design Strategy.

2.8 Outcomes and Scope

- 2.8.1 This report does not seek to make recommendations at this stage for the final model of engagement, governance or decision making regarding disability

inclusive design, as these will result from the review and round table processes described above. However, it is proposed that any solutions should factor in the following elements:

- The capacity, skills, knowledge and commitment of the Council's workforce.
- The sustainability of solutions, which are systemised and strategic and do not rely on specific individuals to deliver them- how any solution will be embedded and not become weakened as its original advocates or leave the council or change depts.
- The potential to agree and adopt inclusive design standards, considering what can be adopted across key areas and where there are gaps, agreement on an appropriate response.
- Costs associated with training, specialist resources and engagement
- Leadership including sponsorship at SMT level and consideration of a network of Inclusive Design Champions across the Council
- The benefits attached to a proposed solution, including its financial, reputational and accessibility advantages
- The flexibility of the model, recognising not one size fits all situations and solutions should be adaptable and flexible depending on type, scope and scale of project.
- Alignment with other Council priorities of a given solution i.e. the Our Manchester Strategy, Inclusive Growth, Our Manchester Disability Plan etc.
- That the fuller consideration of a proposed solution should be underpinned by an equality impact assessment, to understand its potential impacts and to demonstrate how it has due regard of the Council's requirements as set out by the Public Sector Equality Duties.

2.8.2 The anticipated outcomes of this review are:

- 1) A co-designed 'fit for purpose' model of disability engagement to ensure that we have effective, meaningful and timely engagement with disabled people, related to the Council's built environment and public realm projects.
- 2) Effective mechanism to ensure that disability equality and due regard to our Public Sector Equality Duties are fully embedded within the governance of major capital and public realm programmes and in the responsibilities and duties of planning officers and the Planning Committee.
- 3) Learning from the review will inform the new Our Manchester Campaigning and Engagement Framework to support how other Council departments engage with disabled employees and residents. An agreed set of standards and principles that relevant Council services and, through commissioning and contracting arrangements, partners are signed up to and compliant with. Consideration should be given to whether this is best articulated as an Inclusive Design Strategy that builds upon and refreshes the ambitions of the Council's previous Access 2000 strategy.

2.9 Proposed Timescales

2.9.1 The review will take approximately 6 months in order to be comprehensive, meaningful and authentic. However, to prevent delays in engagement on projects during that time, the review team will also take the opportunity to strengthen engagement on projects, where there is an obvious need to do so. The timescales for each stage of the process are as follows:

- Stage 1 - Feb - April (please note, this work is already underway)
- Stage 2 - May and June
- Stage 3 – October
- Launch Disability Built Environment Engagement Model – December

2.10 Communication

2.10.1 This year is an important year for anniversaries relating to disability legislation with the 25-year anniversary of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and the 10-year anniversary for the Equality Act (2010). It's also the 50th anniversary of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (1970), a landmark piece of legislation that was pioneered by Lord Alf Morris (1928-2012). Lord Alf Morris was born and lived in Manchester where he served as MP for Wythenshawe for 33 years.

2.10.2 Since 2015, the Council have sponsored events to celebrate International Day of Disabled People, in partnership with Manchester Central Library and in collaboration with Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People and the Council's disabled staff group. These events have become popular with disabled people's community and created a platform for disabled artists and activists to showcase their talent. They have also led to the creation of a North-West Disability Archive, based in Central Library.

2.10.3 This context of landmark disability anniversaries and the City's growing cultural awareness of disability rights campaigning, past and present, makes 2020 an excellent year for the Council to launch a new model of engagement with disabled residents. Therefore, the Council proposes to launch the new model as part of the event to mark International Day of Disabled People on 3rd December and the EDI Team will work with the Council's Communications Team and OMDP Board to ensure that it receives the visibility that it deserves.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The Council has listened to the members of the Our Manchester Disability Plan Board and recognises that the timing is right for the opportunity to undertake this strength based review, which will build upon what is already working well and also act on lessons learned.

3.2 An effective engagement mechanism that is 'fit for purpose' for capital and public realm projects, will strengthen our connection and trust with disabled residents and help us to move towards the ambition of the Our Manchester Strategy to have a progressive and equitable city.