

Bracknell Forest Retailers' Guide

A guide to serving people with disabilities





Contents

Introduction.....	2
People with disabilities: an opportunity for your business	2
How will improving access help my business?	2
How can you make your business more accessible?.....	3
Who are people with disabilities?	3
Doing business with people who have disabilities	3
Disability checklist for business.....	4
Your premises	5
Parking.....	6
Toilets.....	6
Bracknell Forest Disabled Go Access Guide.....	7
Your staff.....	8
Language	9
Specific Tips for staff.....	10
People with mobility problems	10
People with speech problems	11
People with learning difficulties	12
People with sight problems	13
People with hearing problems	14
Some basic british sign language.....	15
Understanding of dementia	16
Understanding of autism	18
Other Advice	20
Alert Cards	20
Useful Contacts	21



Introduction

This booklet has been produced by Bracknell Forest Council in partnership with the Bracknell Regeneration Partnership and Access Group. Its purpose is to support Bracknell Forest retailers to attract people with disabilities as customers and in turn provide them with excellent customer service.

People with disabilities: an opportunity for your business

There are almost 12,000¹ people in Bracknell Forest with some degree of disability. These residents, along with their family and friends, will make choices on where to live, shop and socialise based largely on accessibility. Bracknell Forest is also home to 14,100¹ people over the age of 65; many of these residents have difficulty with mobility, sight and hearing. They may not identify themselves as having a disability, but an accessible business is likely to benefit them greatly and make them and their family and friends potential customers.

How will improving access help my business?

There are sound business reasons to take account of the needs of these people:

- The opportunity to do business with a significant proportion of the population; who your competitors may well be neglecting,
- Once these people have found a business that suits their needs, they will become loyal customers, returning time after time,
- The consumer experience of people with disabilities heightens the awareness and choices of their family, friends and carers, The new business they bring to your company could increase your cash flow and create additional business revenue,
- Improved physical access could make your business more appealing to many others, including families with children under five who use prams or pushchairs,
- Studies show that corporate reputation is enhanced for businesses that welcome customers with disabilities.

¹Office for national statistics census 2011



Top Tip: As a business, good customer service is one of the most important things that can be offered. This guide aims to help you understand how to improve access to your goods and services for a large part of our community.

How can you make your business more accessible?

Reasonable adjustments: Practical and often low-cost solutions overcome most barriers. Many adjustments are common sense and can be put in place by making simple, cost-effective changes to the way something is done. Other adjustments might need more consideration but could, for example, be put in place as part of a general refurbishment or redecoration programme. Always choose reasonable adjustments so that people with disabilities can access the same or similar service as everyone else.

Who are people with disabilities?

People do not come with labels. People with disabilities are all different and may have a wide range of impairments covering such things as:

- Visual, hearing and/or mobility impairments;
- a physical disability, a long term illness, mental health or psychological difficulties, an acquired brain injury and/or learning or intellectual difficulties, such as autism.

Doing business with people who have disabilities

Attracting and keeping these customers is not just about catering for wheelchair users. Taking a holistic approach and looking at every aspect of your business, you should find that you can meet the needs of most people by being positive and flexible.

Top Tip: Don't miss a marketing opportunity! Tell everyone what you are doing. Include information in your advertising and promotional literature, on your website, in employee newsletters and on any appropriate signage. Your commitment to accessibility and a public statement that your company welcomes customers with disabilities will help to:

- increase the loyalty and satisfaction of existing customers
- attract new customers, publicise your new policies
- gain advantage over your competitors
- enhance your business reputation.

Disability checklist for business

- Have you asked your staff about personal experiences of shopping with a disability, i.e. from relatives/friend that they know?
- Does everyone understand the business case for welcoming these customers?
- Do you keep track of how requests for adjustments from customers are managed?
- Do you routinely consider disability when you update or make changes to the ways you work or to your built environment?
- Do you ask your customers what you can do to make your service easier for them to use - and then take steps to do it?
- Do you highlight the good service you offer to customers who have disabilities in your marketing materials?
- Do your suppliers know you are serious about disability awareness and that you expect the same from them?
- Are your staff trained in disability awareness and what they should do in various situations, including how to help if someone needs to make contact with a carer?
- Are your advisers – legal and otherwise – aware of the essential requirements of the Equality Act 2010?
- Think about “employing” disability champions.

Your premises

There are many things you can do to improve physical access to your business:

- Make sure your premises are well lit. Corners, steps and counter edges marked with high visibility tape so they can be easily seen,
- Lighting inside and outside your business should be non-glare and evenly positioned so visitors can identify any obstacles in the dark, for example car parking, routes to the entrance, corridors etc.
- Paint the edge of entrance steps white to highlight contrast, fit a handrail or install a bell or buzzer and, if necessary, be prepared to go outside to serve someone with an impairment,
- Apart from roadworks and scaffolding, there are many other, sometimes temporary, obstructions that can cause problems for people with disabilities, particularly those with visual problems. A-frame advertising boards placed outside shops, ladders, over-hanging tree branches, dustbins, vehicles and protruding merchandise are all potential hazards,
- Fit easy-grip handles or move existing handles to a more accessible height for wheelchair users,
- A temporary ramp that can be used if a wheelchair user visits. This will also help people making deliveries,
- Keep corridors and aisles clear so wheelchair users and people with poor mobility or visual problems can get through easily,
- Doors can often be heavy so make sure their opening and closing mechanisms work properly with simple to use handles,
- Provide a sturdy chair for customers who have to queue or wait. Consider fast-tracking people who are unable to stand in a queue,
- You could also reserve particular seating or spaces for visitors with disabilities,
- Rugs or loose carpet fittings can be a trip hazard so if used make sure they are recessed or fixed securely onto the floor.



Parking

If you can't provide parking for visitors with disabilities on your premises, make sure your staff know where the nearest parking is located. If you have staff parking, make a staff space available for such visitors by prior arrangement.

Ask people about their requirements in advance if possible; for example, use 'Please let me know if you require any assistance' as a standard line in letters or at the entrance to your shop and as part of your customer care procedures.

Top Tip: If you have a designated disabled parking bay, make sure it is well lit, clearly signposted and that it is not used by staff or delivery drivers.

Toilets

- Consider fitting a handrail to help with sitting down or standing up,
- Make sure the toilet paper holder and spare rolls are within easy reach,
- Consider having an easy to use lever tap fitted to the sink,
- Consider fitting an emergency cord,
- Do staff know where nearest toilets are if not in store (not just disabled toilets),
- If you have toilets on your premises are the coat hooks at an appropriate height for someone in a wheelchair?
- Are staff aware of the RADAR keys for disabled toilets and does your store have one? (An individual can obtain a key from Bracknell Forest Council's Time Square reception by presenting a blue badge).

Top Tip: Don't forget to let customers know about the changes you are making and that you welcome their views on improving services. Customer feedback is the best opportunity to learn more about your customers and their thoughts on how accessible your business really is. They may pass on some useful tips picked up elsewhere and also increase customer loyalty.

Bracknell Forest Disabled Go Access Guide.

As part of Bracknell Forest Council's commitment to make Bracknell Forest the borough of opportunity for everyone, it is vital to ensure that people with disabilities can participate more fully and we support businesses and services to be more inclusive. The Bracknell Forest Disabled Go Access Guide was launched in 2011; this online guide provides a detailed description of access arrangements in over 500 venues providing information to support people with disabilities to explore the borough and helping them to exercise independence and choice. To find out more go to: www.disabledgo.com/organisations/bracknell-forest
Hard copy summaries of the guide are available on request.

Top tip

- Ensure your business is included in the Disabled Go access guide, it's free of charge, and will help promote your business to people with disabilities; contact Bracknell Forest Customer Services
- If customers ask you for information about access in the borough you can signpost them to the guide or even look up information for them.

Your staff

Face-to-face contact and customer support: As a member of staff you should be able to assist a person with disabilities by:

- feeling confident and comfortable with all customers
- being courteous and patient
- never patronising, or thinking you know best
- not making assumptions about what people can and can't do, it's always best to ask them and listen to their reply.
- being ready to offer assistance, but never impose it
- confidently asking whether the person has any requirements and respond sensibly
- knowing what reasonable adjustments your shop can offer
- Keeping corridors and aisles clear of clutter so that wheelchair users and people with poor mobility or visually impairment can get through.

And you must be prepared to:

- move to a place that is quiet or where you can talk with a customer face-to-face
- sit or bend down to talk to a customer at his/her eye-level
- offer a customer a seat or help them with doors
- let a customer take your arm for guidance or support
- offer a customer the use of equipment, for example a clip board, as an alternative writing surface
- use appropriate ways to overcome barriers to communication, for example by writing notes if necessary, some people may also use communicator aids such as boards, wristbands or books
- always talk to a customer directly, never to his or her companion/interpreter
- never shout at or call attention to a customer
- never compromise a customer's right to privacy or confidentiality
- check to make sure a customer has been understood correctly
- be prepared to help a customer pack at the checkout and know if you are able to take the shopping to the car
- Do you know if there is a facility for a customer to order a taxi in the store when they are ready to leave?



Top Tips

- Provide an appropriate (not special) service
- Be patient and understanding
- Be a good listener. Take the time to identify customer needs by asking questions and concentrating on what the customer is really “saying”
- Value every customer equally
- Where appropriate, consider how your shop layout impacts upon all customers. If you have suggestions on how shop layout can be improved speak to your manager
- Good service is satisfying for the customer and the sales assistant, just enjoy it
- People may value good customer service above the cost of goods .

Language

Remember to be natural. Don't worry about using everyday phrases that may seem to refer to an impairment, such as 'see you later' to a blind person. Using the right language will help you build positive relationships. Where possible try not to highlight someone's impairment but, if you have to, people would prefer you to:

- say 'people with disabilities' rather than 'the disabled' or 'handicapped',
- avoid words that imply frailty or dependence (e.g. XXXX 'suffers' from MS),
- say 'XXXX has epilepsy' rather than 'XXXX is an epileptic' or a 'victim of epilepsy' if you need to refer to a person's impairment,
- say XXXX 'is a wheelchair user' rather than XXXX 'is wheelchair bound' or 'XXXX is confined to a wheelchair'.



Specific Tips for staff

People with mobility problems

Customers who use a wheelchair or walking aids do not necessarily need assistance to move around your shop, but they may need help in selecting goods. If you politely ask if they would like help they will let you know what is most appropriate for them. All you have to do is ask. Be particularly attentive if your shop is re-stocking and you have goods and boxes on the sales floor.

Generic Advice

- Do not attempt to physically aid the customer unless requested to do so
- Talk to the customer, not the carer, if they are accompanied
- If requested, help the customer select goods and merchandise, particularly from higher level displays
- Ensure payment machines at cash desks are accessible to all
- If the customer is in a wheelchair try to kneel and have eye level contact when you talk to them
- Talk at a normal voice level and pace and avoid raising your voice
- Is there space for a mobility scooter inside the shop? If not, a polite notice in a prominent place detailing the assistance that can be provided may be appropriate.

People with speech problems

Customers with speech problems will normally indicate this to you. Remember that your customer is engaging with lots of different people so they are experts and will guide you. Be prepared to use your initiative in how to communicate. This may include the use of communication aids. **Also remember that for some English may not be their first language.**

Generic Advice

- Maintain eye contact so you can follow the customer's communications and gestures
- Be attentive so you understand the customer's actions
- Give the person plenty of time to express themselves
- The customer may use hand gestures to indicate their needs and to communicate with you. Please watch carefully
- Be patient and give the person time to finish
- Be prepared to offer a pen and paper so that customers can write things down, especially more complicated requests
- Be patient and be prepared to go at the customer's pace
- Resist finishing off words or sentences.

People with learning difficulties

Customers with learning difficulties require you to be patient and understanding. Communication may not always be easy and you may have to repeat yourself to ensure that you have recognised the customer's needs. Be prepared to move at their pace and avoid causing any distress for the customer. Remember the customer wants to be independent and a shopping trip is important to them.

Generic Advice

- Avoid double negative statements and vague questions, for example, "You do not want that, do you?"
- If necessary repeat what the person is saying to ensure that you have understood your customer's needs
- The customer may be with a carer who can assist if necessary
- Avoid causing distress and be prepared to be patient to allow your customer time to regain their composure
- If the person is having difficulty with their money when paying, offer assistance if you feel it is appropriate
- Be prepared to break information into small chunks and give the person time to understand the information.



People with sight problems

Customers with sight problems are very independent and capable. However, they may still need some extra support with their shopping. They may not be able to read instructions on packaging or signs and may have difficulty with colours. When buying clothes they will need honest advice.

Generic Advice

- Red bands on a cane or dog harness indicate a hearing impairment as well
- Try to ensure that shop signage is as large and clear as possible
- Greet them on arrival so they know an assistant is available. Ask if they want assistance
- Do not take hold of the customer. Ask if they would like to take your arm for them to hold when leading them through the shop
- Do not walk too quickly and avoid sudden changes of pace or direction
- Watch out for hazards at head height, especially if the person you are guiding is taller than you
- Give clear advice of any obstructions (stock re-fills, packaging, displays) or changes in direction
- Be available to read instructions on packaging or signs
- Ensure you confirm the price of and sizes of goods before they get to the cash till. Look at the possibility of installing an audio-enhanced checkout system announcing the price and quantity of scanned merchandise
- Remember to say goodbye or let them know you are walking away when you leave a blind person so that they are not left talking to themselves
- Visually impaired pedestrians may need to keep in close contact with the building frontages in order to avoid getting disorientated or lost. There are many, sometimes temporary, obstructions that can cause problems
- Assistance dogs should be approached from the side opposite the dog. Do not take hold of the harness or lead
- Assistance dogs should not be distracted. Remember it is a working dog not a pet (However, water bowls would be appreciated).

People with hearing problems

If a customer does not immediately respond to your greeting perhaps they are simply unable to hear you. Try again when you get eye contact. The person would normally indicate if they have difficulty with their hearing. You should be able to communicate more easily by maintaining eye contact. Speak normally but clearly; the person should then be able to “hear” and understand you; they may like a pen and notepad to write down their requirements.

Generic Advice

- Advertise if you have hearing loops in store/at kiosk/checkout points, ensure you understand how to use these systems and ensure that they are tested regularly
- Start by gaining eye contact and then greet the customer
- Try not to touch the customer to attract their attention; it is usually acceptable to gently and politely tap a deaf person on the shoulder to attract their attention. However, be aware that sharp movements/touch could cause unwanted surprise
- Do not presume that a person wearing a hearing aid can hear perfectly; speech is often one of the hardest frequencies to pick up
- When talking always keep eye contact – do not turn away to point things out as the person will not be able to see what you are saying
- Do not cover your mouth with your hand, paper or a pen and do not speak with anything in your mouth
- Try to face the customer when speaking
- Talk at normal voice levels and pace – **Don't shout**. This distorts your mouth, making you harder to understand
- Be aware that a beard or moustache may make lip-reading difficult
- The person may use hand gestures to indicate their needs and to communicate with you. Please watch carefully

- When communicating via an interpreter, speak normally allowing time for translation. The interpreter will let you know if you need to change your pace
- Talk to the person not the interpreter
- At the till, be prepared to show the customer the price rather than just saying it
- Assistance dogs should be approached from the side opposite the dog. Do not take hold of the harness or lead
- Assistance dogs should not be distracted. Remember it is a working dog not a pet. (However, water bowls would be appreciated).





Understanding of dementia

People with dementia may experience a range of problems that have the potential to impact on their ability to interact with those they encounter. Similarly those they encounter may be unsure how and whether to help people who appear to be experiencing difficulties.

People with dementia all differ in the way they experience their dementia, but may have a range of difficulties, including:

- problems remembering what they are doing
- difficulties in communicating clearly
- problems handling money
- problems navigating in complex or confusing environments.

How staff respond to people who may be experiencing these kinds of problem can make a real difference.

How can I spot a person with dementia?

You can't. Most people with dementia are over 65, but some are younger. Some people with dementia will tell you if they are having problems, and how you can help. You might also notice customers doing, or saying things which suggest that they are having problems that might be caused by dementia. These include:

- Looking, or saying that they are a bit lost or confused
- Appearing to be searching for something they can't find
- Looking like they don't know what to do next
- Appearing to have problems handling or understanding their money, or how to use their card
- Finding self-service facilities hard to understand
- Their speech might be hard to understand
- Appearing to have problems understanding what you are saying
- Forgetting to pay for things that they have picked up.

Of course, there are all sorts of reason why people might be having these problems that are not related to dementia or memory problems. Generally-speaking - the younger the person appears to be, the less likely it is to be dementia-related. But remember, younger people can have dementia too.

Good Customer Service

Kindness, common sense, avoiding stress, using good communication skills and a smile go a very long way. The top tips contained in this document cover most ways to assist a customer who has dementia.

Additional Generic Advice:

- Simply asking if you can help can go a long way
- Offer to pick out the right money if someone appears to be struggling to work out the coins or notes in their hand
- Offer to run the items through self-service, or show them how to do it
- Ask if they would like to sign for their purchase if they can't remember their PIN
- Offer to keep their shopping to one side so that they can come back and collect it once they have remembered their PIN.

What can you do if someone appears to have forgotten to pay for something?

This is difficult. While someone may have forgotten to pay, they might equally be engaged in theft, and your safety is the most important thing. **If you know** the person, and you **know** that they have dementia, then you can simply ask if you can help, and if they would like to pay. This will often be all you need to do.

Very rarely, people with dementia will not understand that they need to pay, or may feel that they shouldn't. In these cases, it is up to the discretion of your manager. Some businesses, if they know the person and their carer, have simply totted up the value of goods, and asked the carer to arrange for payment.

If you do not know the person, then your business' usual policy on theft should apply.

Understanding of autism

Autism, often referred to as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a spectrum condition, meaning that people with autism can experience varying difficulties. Autistic people often don't like unfamiliarity; be it a place, object or person, and this can cause them to feel anxious and frustrated. People with autism typically have difficulties, to varying degrees, with three main things; these are called the Triad of Impairments. This means that no two people with autism are necessarily the same.

The Triad of Impairment main areas are;

- Difficulty with social communication
- Difficulty with social interaction
- Difficulty with social imagination.

Difficulty with social communication. Individuals with autism can find it difficult to use or understand:

- facial expressions or tone of voice
- jokes and sarcasm
- common phrases and sayings; an example might be the phrase 'It's cool', which people often say when they think that something is good, but strictly speaking, means that it's a bit cold.

Difficulty with social interaction. Individuals with autism may:

- not understand the unwritten social rules: they may stand too close to another person or start an inappropriate subject of conversation
- appear to be insensitive because they have not recognised how someone else is feeling
- appear to behave 'strangely' or inappropriately, as it is not always easy for them to express feelings, emotions or needs.





Difficulty with social imagination. Individuals with an autism spectrum condition may find it hard to:

- understand and interpret other people's thoughts, feelings and actions
- predict what will happen next, or what could happen next
- understand the concept of danger, for example that running on to a busy road poses a threat to them
- cope in new or unfamiliar situations.

Many people with ASD also have difficulty processing everyday sensory information such as sounds, sights and smells. This is usually called having sensory integration difficulties or sensory sensitivity and can have a profound effect on that person's life.

Good Customer Service

The top tips covered earlier in this document deal with most ways to assist a person with an autistic spectrum condition. In addition, being autism aware will give you the confidence to approach and help someone who could be in need. Kindness, common sense, being calm, avoiding stress, using good communication skills and a smile go a very long way. In certain cases there may be a need for flexibility to alter the lighting or music volume upon request if the person has sensory sensitivity.

Other Advice

Alert Cards

Are you aware of the following cards:

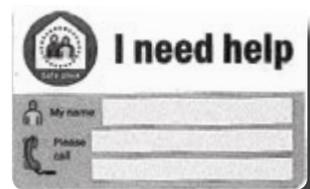
Just Can't Wait Card

Some people may have a medical condition which means they will need to use a toilet quickly and may show you a 'Just Can't Wait' toilet card. Do you know if your shop staff toilets could be used if presented with this card?



Safe Place Card

People may carry a 'safe place' card which gives their name and the contact details of someone to call when they need some help. When someone feels vulnerable, they may hand the card to you so you are then able to call the person nominated on the card to provide assistance/help.



Businesses/shops can volunteer to act as safe places by displaying the badge in their premises and people can go into the safe place if they feel vulnerable. So we could encourage shops to sign up to become a safe place. To find out more contact Bracknell Forest Customer Services.

Autism Alert Card

Some people may carry and present the Autism Alert Card and may show this to staff if the individual finds themselves in a situation where they cannot easily explain their behaviour. The card gives some simple advice, the person's name and emergency contact details. It will explain how you can help the card holder as well as identifying that you are dealing with someone with autism.



Useful Contacts

If you would like some assistance with raising the awareness of your staff on any aspect of disability please contact: Rob Morris at Bracknell Regeneration Partnership.
Telephone: 01344 350086, Email: rob.morris@bracknell.co.uk

Some other useful contacts:

Bracknell Forest Council Customer Services.
Telephone: 01344 352000. (Monday to Friday 8.30am – 5pm)
Email:customer.services@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Bracknell Shopmobility- Can help those who need help getting around
<http://www.bracknellshopmobility.co.uk>
23 Princess Square, Bracknell
Telephone: 01344 861316 and speak to Becky or Sue
Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 4pm

We hope you have found this guide useful. Remember that quality service is one of the most important things that can be offered. It is good for business, good for staff, good for customers and good for everyone.

Copies of this booklet may be obtained in large print, Braille, on audio cassette or in other languages. To obtain a copy in an alternative format please telephone 01344 352000.

Nepali

यस प्रचारको सक्षेपं वा सार निचोड चाहिं दिइने छ, ठूलो अक्षरमा, ब्रेल वा क्यासेट सूनको लागी । अरु भाषाको नक्कल पनि हासिल गर्न सकिने छ । कृपया सम्पर्क गनुहोला ०१३४४ ३५२००० ।

Tagalog

Mga buod/ mga hango ng dokumentong ito ay makukuha sa malaking letra, limbag ng mga bulag o audio kasette. Mga kopya sa ibat-ibang wika ay inyo ring makakamtan. Makipag-alam sa 01344 352000

Urdu

اس دستاویز کے خلاصے یا مختصر متن جلی حروف، بریل لکھائی یا پھر آڈیو کیسٹ پر ریکارڈ شدہ صورت میں فراہم کئے جا سکتے ہیں۔ دیگر زبانوں میں اس کی کاپی بھی حاصل کی جا سکتی ہے۔ اس کے لیے براہ مہربانی ٹیلیفون نمبر 01344 352000 پر رابطہ کریں۔

Polish

Streszczenia lub fragmenty tego dokumentu mogą być dostępne w wersji napisanej dużym drukiem, pismem Brajla lub na kasecie audio. Można również otrzymać kopie w innych językach. Proszę skontaktować się z numerem 01344 352000.

Portuguese

Podemos disponibilizar resumos ou extractos deste documento em impressão grande, em Braille ou em audiocassete. Podem também ser obtidas cópias em outros idiomas. Por favor ligue para o 01344 352000.