

ACCESS COMMITTEE
11 MARCH 1998

Present: Councillor Ward (Chairman)

Councillor Mrs Clifford (Vice Chairman)

Councillor Finnie

Councillor Mrs Sutcliffe

Ms M Abbott	Downside Resource Centre
Miss T Azam	Bracknell and Wokingham Muscular Dystrophy Group
Ms C Dann	Bracknell Users Group
Mr P Fox	Bracknell Forest MENCAP
Mrs D Drummond	Community Council for Berkshire
Mrs H Hart	Berkshire Multiple Sclerosis Therapy Centre
Mr L Harvey	Forestline Community Transport
Mr M Maice	Forestline Community Transport
Mr E Mallett	Red Diamond Disabled Sports Association
Mrs I Mattick	Triple 'A'
Mrs P Sanderson	The Ark
Mr M Shrimpton	Berkshire Disability Information Network
Mr A Tarry	National Federation for the Blind
Mrs B Thompson	Arthritis Care
Mr P M Thompson	Arthritis Care
Mrs I Tilbury	Arthritis Care
Mrs J Townsend	Bracknell Citizens' Advice Bureau

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mrs A Butler-Smith Bracknell Council for Voluntary Service

Mrs S Kearton Bracknell Citizens' Advice Bureau

Mrs J Revans Community Resource Worker, Berkshire Social

Services

Mrs M Thompson Action Group for the Physically Handicapped

The Vice Chairman was in the Chair for Minutes 89 to 91

89. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 December 1997 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

90. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Minute 82 - The Use of Tactile Paving Surfaces and Dropped Kerbs

The Access and Mobility Officer reported that the Planning and Transportation Committee on 3 March 1998 had approved (with minor amendments) the policy on tactile paving and dropped kerbs put forward by the Committee at its last meeting.

Minute 83 - Bracknell Town Centre: Urban Design Framework

The Access and Mobility Officer advised that as a result of the Committee's comments to the Borough Planning Officer a further paragraph had been included in the Council's response to the Urban Design Framework document.

91. **Leisure Services**

The Director of Leisure Services, Vincent Paliczka, gave a presentation to the Committee on the access issues relating to the Leisure Services Department and answered questions from members of the Committee.

The Director initially highlighted that there were four key elements to leisure services and these were Libraries, Arts and Information; Countryside and Heritage; Leisure and Amenities; and Youth and Community. The Director advised that most Leisure buildings generally were accessible to wheelchair users although there were some which did not currently offer wheelchair access. However, the Council was implementing a series of access improvements such as the installation of chair lifts (if feasible) and automatic doors at Bracknell Central Library, the creation of a new entrance at Sandhurst Sports Centre and a chair lift at South Hill Park Arts Centre. He also gave information on the house bound and special library services.

The Director stressed that access must relate to much more than physical access and identified potential areas for increasing access to services through training initiatives for staff, co-ordination with other agencies such as the Sports Council, and using and sharing the joint expertise that now exists in the Unitary Authority. Access to information via electronic means could reduce the need to travel as do services such as the housebound and special library services. Conflicts could exist in areas such as the Countryside where access and preventing urbanisation could seem to be mutually exclusive but where possible access was made. Examples such as the wheelchair accessible nature trail at Ambarrow Court and providing identified individuals with keys for barriers were given.

The Director stressed that access would be a key issue in each of the section's business plans in future and that he viewed that progress towards increasing access was part of the leisure's core business.

Following questions relating to swimming pools, special library services and training, the Committee thanked the Director for his presentation.

92. **Mobility Schemes 1997/98 (Item 1)**

The Access and Mobility Officer reported that the 1997/98 Mobility Schemes budget provision of £50,000 had been allocated by the Planning and Transportation Committee to the following four areas:

- (i) the installation of dropped kerbs and tactile paving where appropriate;
- (ii) minor alterations to footways;
- (iii) upgrading of areas in the vicinity of disabled persons' parking bays; and
- (iv) refurbishment of the wheelchair accessible WC facility in the High Street Car Park.

The Committee noted the report on the proposed Mobility Schemes for 1997/98. The Access and Mobility Officer requested members of the Committee to advise her of any particular sites that might benefit from accessibility improvements.

The Committee also noted that there was an intention for future funds in the Mobility Schemes budget to be used to establish a Shopmobility scheme for Bracknell town centre. This would be subject to the involvement of traders in the town centre. The Committee also considered the issue of "A" boards and other displays outside shops within the town centre. It was agreed that the Access and Mobility Officer would pursue the matter of "A" boards with the Town Centre Development Manager.

93. Access for Disabled People - Places with Entertainment Licences (Item 2)

The Committee considered a report, in which the background to an incident in which a wheelchair user had been refused access to a local public house, was explained. The Committee noted that the Council as a licensing authority had a duty to ensure that premises licensed for public entertainment could be evacuated safely in an emergency. Some buildings could not, without adaptation, provide a safe means of escape for wheelchair users, given the large numbers that might be present for a public entertainment and it was possible in those circumstances that a licence would include a condition, providing no access to wheelchair users; this was a last resort when the licence holder was unable or unwilling to carry out the necessary works. However, such conditions were only in force at times when entertainments were taking place. Officers continued to promote and encourage access improvements where appropriate to enable the removal of such conditions. The Committee also noted that as a result of the publicity arising from this incident, the public house in question had now become fully accessible to wheelchair users.

94. Accessible Taxis (Item 3)

The Access Committee was advised that following a meeting of the Hackney Carriage Sub Committee on 19 February 1998 a number of issues relating to the accessibility of hackney carriages and private hire vehicles had been referred to the Committee for its comments. The Borough Surveyor outlined the complex legislative background to hackney carriage and private hire vehicle licensing and in particular explained the difference between a hackney carriage and a private hire vehicle: the former being able to ply for hire and seek custom on ranks; the latter only carrying out pre-booked journeys, logged with an operator. The Borough Surveyor stressed that the provisions in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 related to hackney carriages only and would not apply to private hire vehicles.

It was noted that the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) had undertaken an informal consultation exercise on the accessibility of hackney carriages, but in view of the overwhelming response to the consultation, it had indicated that it was unlikely guidance on accessible hackney carriages would be forthcoming for some time

Members of the Committee discussed the hackney carriage and private hire vehicle provision locally. The Committee noted that of the 121 Hackney Carriages operating within Bracknell Forest, three were wheelchair accessible; these were the London-type taxis. Some members expressed a view that the service provided by local operators in relation to private hire vehicles was unreliable and that there was a

demand for a reliable accessible service. In relation to hackney carriages, members agreed that London-type taxis were accessible to many wheelchair users, however, they were not always accessible to some people with ambulant disabilities and elderly people. It was agreed that the advice and views put forward by members of the Committee would be given further consideration.

95. **Improvements to Council Offices (Item 4)**

The Committee noted a report which outlined the access arrangements at Easthampstead House, Seymour House, Edward Elgar House (formerly Fitzwilliam House) and Time Square.

96. **Disability Discrimination Act 1995 The Government's Proposals for Buses and Coaches (Item 5)**

The Access and Mobility Officer advised that the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions had issued an informal consultation document on its proposals for improving accessibility of buses and coaches. The Committee noted the deadline for the submission of comments to the DETR was 17 April and the Access and Mobility Officer advised that if members of the Committee wished to obtain copies of the consultation document they should seek copies from her.

97. **RAMPO Fund (Item 6)**

The Committee considered an application from Bracknell Royal British Legion Club seeking a grant towards the construction of a ramp at their building entrance in Bracknell town centre. The Committee noted that there was £2,518.80 in the RAMPO fund, which was available to provide small grants towards the construction of such ramps, and in recent years the number of awards from the fund had fallen. The Committee was advised that the Club would be providing information on the final grant request, when it had received a series of estimates for the works. On the basis that the Club was used by a variety of groups, the Committee supported the application in principle and agreed that the Access and Mobility Officer in consultation with the Chairman should determine the level of the award to the Club.

RECOMMENDED that the Strategy and Policy Committee authorise the Access and Mobility Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Access Committee, to consider and determine the application from the Bracknell Royal British Legion Club for a grant towards the construction of a ramp, upon the receipt of further information from the applicant.

98. **Community Council for Berkshire's Community Transport Conference (Item 7)**

The Committee noted a report on the Community Council for Berkshire's Conference held on 31 January 1998, entitled 'the Role of Community Action in Achieving Integrated Transport in the New Berkshire'.

99. **Access Committee Training**

The Committee was advised that following its last meeting two training sessions had been arranged for members of the Committee on participation at Committee meetings. However as the Council's Training Officer had been due to leave the Council's employment the training sessions had been postponed. The Committee noted that when the new training officer was in post in April, the training sessions would be re-scheduled.

The meeting commenced at 7.30pm and concluded at 9.10pm.

CHAIRMAN