

# Disability Forum Action Plan

Promoting inclusion and accessibility



# Background

A meeting was held with the Forum Chair, supporting officers, and several councillors to discuss what these priorities should be.

A draft list was shared with the Disability Forum so that members could review and agree the final set.

At the Forum's quarterly meeting in July, members agreed the following priorities:

- Access to shops, businesses, leisure, and sports activities
- Accessible and affordable local transport
- Making Council services fully accessible
- Inclusive planning processes
- Employment opportunities for disabled residents
- Council involvement and representation
- Improved communication and public awareness

Additional priorities were added:

- Inclusive housing
- Co-production of services, Accessible green spaces, Enhanced training and easy-rea/co-produced resources





## Improving Access to Businesses and Leisure

### Promote accessibility grants

- Businesses can apply for up to £10,000 to improve access through the Shop Front Grant.

### Address long-standing issues (e.g., Post Office)

- Council officers and councillors have visited the Post Office. Minor improvements have been made, and they've been encouraged to apply for the grant.

### Recognise accessible businesses

- Proposal for an annual in-person forum event to celebrate achievements and introduce accessibility awards.

### Review previous access surveys

- Stowmarket and Needham Market surveys have been reviewed. New wayfinding signage supports with signage recommendations. Further concerns/actions can be discussed at a future forum meeting.



# Accessible and Affordable Transport

## Improve taxi accessibility

- Explore additional training so drivers feel confident supporting disabled passengers.
- Consider a “Good Business” award to recognise excellent, accessible customer service.

## Improve access and affordability of transport services

- Mid Suffolk continues to fund and promote Rural Connect and the Mid Suffolk Taxi Bus (running until summer).
- The Sustainable Travel Manager will keep the forum updated.
- Work with the Community Rail Partnership to address issues at Stowmarket Station.

## Develop accessible trails, footways & mobility-hire options

- A 10-year plan is already in place for improving walking and cycling routes – this could be a future forum agenda item.
- Suffolk County Council is exploring cycle hubs in Stowmarket, Thurston and Stanton, with potential to review their accessibility.
- E-bike rental is available at Needham Lakes.



# Accessible and Affordable Transport

Access to green social prescribing:

- The Council works with several initiatives such as:
- ActivGardens – community gardening and outdoor activities
- Red Gables Garden Project – inclusive garden-based wellbeing sessions
- Feel Good Suffolk Wellbeing Walks – accessible group walks in nature
- Green Light Trust – nature-based therapeutic programmes
- Additionally, the Youth Social Prescribing Project in Mid Suffolk and Babergh may connect young people to green activities
- Could this be a future agenda item?

**Promote inclusive walkways**

- The Feel Good Suffolk team will attend a future forum meeting.
- They will share current walking routes and work with the forum to gather feedback on accessibility.

**Improve access to green spaces**

- The Council will launch a Community Nature Recovery Scheme next year.
- It is recommended that the Climate Team present this work to the forum so members can understand what it will offer and how they can be involved.

# Ensure Council services are accessible



## Cost of living and winter support

- Working with ACE Anglia to create accessible “staying warm in winter” materials.
- Cost-of-living information has already been shared with the forum.
- A small budget is available to create accessible documents or videos, where co-design would help make services clearer.

## Accessible voting

- David Connors is working with the forum to develop accessible election materials.

## Auditing Council buildings

- The Stowmarket Customer Access Point has been reviewed previously and improvements were made.
- Most other in-person services are delivered through libraries, which already have AccessAble audits.
- There have been recent concerns raised about Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre — more information is needed so this can be added to the plan.

# Ensure Council services are accessible



## Mandatory accessibility training

- All staff and councillors receive Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) training.
- Council reports includes an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA).

## Explore additional disability-specific training

- Working with Adult Social Care to understand the Oliver McGowan training (national training on learning disabilities and autism).
- Reviewing whether this could be offered to appropriate teams.

## Strengthening awareness across the Council

- ED&I Champions could share updates with the forum and present relevant work.

## Council internships & volunteer roles

- As a Disability Confident Employer, the Council guarantees interviews for disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria.
- The forum will be kept informed about job opportunities across Suffolk.

## Partner with employers

- Employment & Skills plans with local businesses include commitments to create inclusive job opportunities.

## Support social enterprises

- Economic Development and Communities teams already work with local social enterprises that employ disabled people.



## Inclusive planning & enhancing places to live

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### Make planning more accessible

- Two planning officers will work with the forum.
- A small planning subgroup will look at accessible design and the Wellbeing Impact Assessment (WIA).
- The Disability Forum are formally consulted on all applications involving public access.

### More accessible housing options

- The new Joint Local Plan will look to include the need for more wheelchair-accessible homes.
- The forum will be involved as the plan develops.

### Reduce delays for home adaptations

- Exploring occupational therapist (OT) support to reduce long wait times via a contracted service and working with Suffolk County Council to review waiting times.
- A new resident liaison officer is proposed to help coordinate OT requests and work closely with the forum.

## Council Involvement and representation, communications and engagement



### Stronger representation for disabled residents

- A Councillor Champion for Disability has been appointed (Cllr Terrence Carter).
- Their role is to support the forum and advocate for accessibility across the Council.

### Formal role in policy and decision-making

- The Disability Forum is now included in the Council's consultation database, ensuring it is asked for feedback on relevant policies.
- Engagement Hub guidance encourages teams to involve the Forum.
- The Forum will be promoted for EQIA development and policy development.

### Working with other district forums

- Officer support already meets with other disability forums to share good practice.
- This collaboration will continue, especially as plans for local-government reorganisation (LGR) develop.

### Improving communication and public awareness

- A communications campaign will promote the Forum's work.
- A new co-designed logo, updated leaflet, and poster are being developed as well as social media- if anyone is interested in helping to promote the forum, it would be gratefully received.
- The Council's communications and engagement team will bring next steps to the Forum.

# Next steps

- We could use the plan to help guide future meeting topics?
- We can create an accessible version of the plan for the website?
- We can discuss progress at meetings to see if we need to add/remove items from the plan.

