External Stakeholder Analysis

Section 1: Introduction

This external stakeholder analysis is based on meetings and conversations with a wide range of organisations and people across Brighton & Hove. We engaged with 9 Disabled People's Organisations and 6 individual disabled people.

The organisations we engaged with were pan-impairment and covered physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities. Those who engaged were from both larger DPOs and some of the smaller organisations supporting people in the area. The organisations who engaged are listed in Appendix 1.

The conversations focused around 3 key themes:

- What does disability mean?
- What does accessibility mean?
- What are the issues for you and the disabled people you support?

These themes are addressed in detail below.

All stakeholders were made aware that this project was intended to support BHCC's planning process and thinking prior to the development of the Accessible City Strategy. They understood that further consultation and engagement will be undertaken in order to develop the strategy itself. Inevitably thoughts and ideas were shared about what the Council could do to make the city as accessible as possible. These ideas are reported here, so as not to lose this vital voice.

The experiences and views expressed during this project have not been edited in this report and are reflected as the issues participants chose to focus on. Much of the focus was on physical access, as many participants were focusing on the practical aspects of accessibility in their every day life.

Section 2: What does disability mean?

As would be expected, the views on what disability means are wide ranging. Clearly physical disabilities (such as wheelchair users) were a key element in understanding what disability means.

There was also a strong view expressed about the importance of recognising mental health and emotional wellbeing as part of any definition and understanding of disability. A strong focus on both visible and non-visible disabilities was identified as a key factor here.

DPOs focused heavily on the importance of using the social model in interpreting what disability means and how this needs to be reflected both in the development and approach of the strategy and the language used throughout.

It was also recognised that not everyone who has accessibility needs identifies as disabled, so there is a need to ensure the strategy has far reach and is communicated with this in mind.

A number of organisations and individual disabled people expressed the view that, certainly for children and young people with a disability, the definition should be extended to include family members who support that person.

As will already be recognised by BHCC, it is important to reference the Deaf community as distinct from the disabled community. Although clearly not all deaf people agree with this, it was the view expressed by those involved in this project.

Section 3: What is Accessibility?

A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the importance of being able to live as independently as possible. This means being able to access services with minimal barriers, even though disabled people may need to do this differently (such as providing alternative means of contacting specific services if the typical route would not work for that person).

Living independently means that everything should to be accessible on the journey a person is taking from leaving home to arriving at their destination and include whatever activity they are undertaking. This might include things such as:

- suitable, appropriate and available changing spaces;
- the use of accessible toilet facilities (without having to ask permission to use them as this does not maintain a persons dignity);
- appropriate parking facilities for people who are unable to take public transport;
- roads and pavements that are free of barriers; and
- accessible public transport.

Accessibility was about quality of life and feeling welcome across the City. It was felt that Brighton & Hove was a fairly welcoming City, but this was not experience for all. For some people the City was seen as inaccessible when people do not receive the support that they need. There was an understanding that the City is old, with many heritage building which can be difficult to access and the steps the Council can take may be limited.

There was a concern that accessibility sometimes was seen as an inconvenience and not important enough to invest time and money. As an example, during the COVID response the focus was on the need to provide outside space for leisure activities (such as dining). However, this had a detrimental impact on some disabled people who have physical access requirements who found it difficult to navigate around a significant increase in street furniture. There was a view that non-disabled people were prioritised at the expense of disabled people.

British Sign Language users felt that their needs were seen as negligible so not taken into account. As an example, online services do not routinely provide subtitles or BSL interpretation.

There was a feeling that where accessibility needs are not planned for, disabled people can become excluded. There would appear to be the need to think more

carefully about the customer experience and journey specifically for a disabled person. This would involve asking key questions such as:

- What are the potential barriers?
- How do we remove or minimise these barriers?

Research shows (and is supported by the views of people engaging in this project) that disabled people do not always push for what they need. This is particularly the case if there appears to be barriers in the way of accessing what they need. This can leave disabled people both excluded and frustrated.

As mentioned previously in this report, a focus on the social model of disability would actually improve access for all. For the people who engaged with this review, BHCC needs to recognise the social impact of getting things wrong and not being accessible

Accessibility also requires a focus on information. This includes:

- How information is presented
- How easy it is to find and understand
- How meaningful it is in supporting disabled people.

There was a strong feeling that some of the key messages and priorities communicated by BHCC can leave disabled people feeling excluded. For example, there is a strong messaging campaign focused on "leave your car at home" and walk, cycle or take public transport. For some disabled people and their families, this is not a realistic alternative. This led some disabled people they subsequently felt an inconvenience and were judged by others for not embracing this principle. They also felt that their options were becoming increasingly limited, because of this environmental focus.

Accessibility features are available in some areas of the City and this is valued. However, there were many experiences of accessible toilets being filled with baby changing facilities which meant there was insufficient room for the disabled person to move in the area or it being used as a storage facility (e.g. for cleaning products or spare chairs).

Some accessible services (such as trikes to be able to access the beach) were not being reserved for people with the need for it but used by people who wanted to have fun. This lack of prioritisation reduced a disabled person access to spending time on the beach.

Accessibility also means being able to enjoy all of the services offered to disabled people, rather than this being limited. For example, in a local leisure centre a hoist was provided to access the main swimming pool, but not the jacuzzi or hydrotherapy pool. This meant the disabled person was limited in terms of what they could use.

It is also important to recognise intersectionality when considering accessibility. A disabled person has many other characteristics alongside being disabled. In considering accessibility, BHCC needs to take account of the additional barriers disabled people may face such as the impact of poverty, lack of accessible housing,

health inequalities, a lack of meaningful social engagement and access to meaningful work experience and employment.

Section 4: What are the issues for you and the disabled people you support?

During this project, a number of issues were raised by disabled people which they would like BHCC to be aware of as they develop an Accessible City Strategy. These are explored below.

Impact of COVID

COVID has made things much harder for many, particularly disabled people and there is a concern that disabled people are being left behind as life gets back to "normal". A number of face-to-face services (such as day centres for people with learning disabilities) have been closed and which are unlikely to return.

The Disabled People's Organisations we engaged with recognised there had been a significant increase in the number of people with mental ill health during this time. There was a concern that if all services are moved online, this may lead to some disabled people feeling isolated and thereby left behind.

Building community

Partly linked to the impact of COVID, but also reflective of a longer-term trend, some disabled people involved in this project report experiencing a somewhat fractured sense of community which has led to feelings of marginalisation. This is due in some part to a reduction in face-to-face services for disabled people. There was a sense that to feel part of their own, as well as the wider, community, proactive steps need to be taken to rebuild this sense of community. For some, the absence of a sense of community has led to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

In a practical sense, there was a view that BHCC needs to give clearer though to what a "community hub" means. This has been used as part of planning applications, where businesses have been granted a licence to operate, partly on the grounds of being a community hub. It was unclear to some participating in this project what the definition of community hub was. Their experience was that it allowed businesses to attract customers who could afford to pay for their services, rather than attracting those people who lived in the locality and would benefit from being involved in community activities. Of course not all disabled people who engaged in this project saw themselves as part of a disabled community as such.

Developing Council strategy and services

In terms of developing Council strategy and services, a strong view was expressed that disabled people and their needs should to be placed at centre of what the strategy is about and not seen as add on. For example, when events are organised in the City, access requirements should be central to the planning of this. There was a feeling amongst those taking part in this project that accessibility was an "extra thought".

It was seen as important that BHCC think about impact of its decisions on disabled people. For example, disabled parking removed during the COVID response so

others could exercise outdoors. For some, this implied that disabled people and their needs were less important. Other examples included temporarily changing the layout of City, closing roads, cafes etc coming out into pavement – without thinking about the impact on disabled people. When temporary changes are made which result in accessible provisions being removed, alternative provision is not always provided.

Connectivity across Council services / policies / initiatives was seen as critical. For example, cycle lanes were a good idea, but need to take account of disabled people and their accessibility needs. Ensuring that all aspects are connected would reduce the risk of silo thinking.

Linked to this was the need to ensure that accessibility and the needs of disabled people are reflected in every strategy and that this becomes business as usual for BHCC. The experience of some disabled people is that Council services and strategies are not linked up, which results in difficulty in accessing these services. A common experience reported was some disabled people needing to repeat themselves to numerous departments in order to access what they needed. A suggestion was made that involving disability specialists in the development of every strategy may improve this situation.

The organisations we engaged with recognised the need to have flexibility around how people accessed services. This included both the times when a person would be available to speak to them and whether the services was available face to face or only online. It was recognised that moving all services online could lead to digital exclusion for some disabled people. Having a range of ways to access the Council was seen as critical.

Some of the disabled people we engaged with found the system quite intimidating, specifically the number of forms they needed to complete and keeping up with changing rules and regulations. This led to a degree of disengagement with some people feeling "it just wasn't worth it".

Representation & Governance

In relation to representation and governance, there was a view that having a greater number of disabled Councillors would be beneficial to the disabled community. Of course, this may already be the case, given the nature of hidden disabilities. If this is the reality, then increasing the visibility of disabled Councillors may reassure people that their specific needs and experiences are at the heart of Council decision making.

Having lived experience of disability, particularly within the Brighton & Hove area was seen as critical when making decisions which affect the everyday life of disabled residents.

Linked to this was a desire to see disabled people represented across Council Directorates. Again, the actual representation of disabled employees at BHCC is not known to residents, so this concern may be based on perception rather than reality.

A key practical concern was the need to make all council meetings accessible. Specific concerns raised included the requirement to have subtitles ava from the beginning, wheelchair accessible

Involvement and consultation

The importance of structured and meaningful involvement and consultation was identified as a key priority. There was a feeling that consultation currently was sometimes non-existent or tokenistic, meaning that disabled people's voices were not always heard or valued. This has led to a lack of trust in BHCC when people are asked to share information.

Clear signposting of available opportunities for consultation and involvement was important. Equally offering a variety of access routes to these activities was important, with not all being available only online.

Public transport and parking

A strong theme for a number of people involved in this project was the importance of being able to access a range of travel options.

There was excellent feedback provided from a range of stakeholders about the City bus services, both in terms of physical access and the training provided to bus drivers. This meant that for many people, they were able to travel around the City in a barrier free way.

For others, they were not able to access public transport because of their specific requirements and therefore relied on their own private transport. There was a concern that wider Council policy which encouraged alterative, green means of travel had, in effect, "demonised" the use of cars. The strong messaging around taking public transport, cycling for walking left some disabled people feeling judged because they were not able to do this.

The importance of having accessible parking options, throughout the City was seen as critical. There was also a sense of unfairness that some disabled parking spaces were time limited (such as on the seafront) whereas equivalent non-disabled parking did not have the same criteria applied.

The size of some parking spaces was also identified as a barrier. Although it was recognised that parking policy was intended to limit the parking of large camper vans overnight, this did restrict the ability for wheelchair accessible vehicles to use this space.

Section 5: Ideas to consider

Throughout this external stakeholder analysis, a number of ideas were put forward by stakeholders. These are recorded below in order to inform the development of the Accessible City Strategy.

- BHCC could take the lead in the provision of work experience and subsequent employment opportunities for disabled people, both within the Council and as an influencer with other stakeholders.

- City Accessibility Ambassadors, drawn from across BHCC and their partners who ensure that the needs of disabled people are taken into account when making decisions (such as the planning of public events)
- Advocates who are trained in supporting disabled people to be able to access Council services as easily as possible.
- Training made available to businesses on how to support disabled people across the City
- Accessible changing rooms and places across the City, which are freely available to disabled people and their families, preferably without the requirement to ask permission to use them
- Wheelchair friendly swings installed in play parks when they are being refurbished or developed.
- Ensuring that all communication uses simple language, simple concepts and visual illustrations. This could include, as an example, signs and symbols in play parks such as the use of Makaton

Appendix 1

Disabled People's Organisations that engaged with this project include:

- Possability People
- Scope
- Grace Eyre
- Speak Out
- Amaze
- Parent Carers Forum
- BADGE
- Mind
- Deaf Cog