

Equal Access Advisory Group

Meeting Minutes – In-person and Virtual 8th April 2025

Meeting Theme – Disability Benefit Changes

Attendees – Dr Deborah Lawson (via Zoom), Cllr Kay Wesley (Chair), Theresa Graystone, Alec Scaresbrook, Cathy Dean, Tom Stephans, Diane Ritherdon.

Apologies - Denis Murphy and Angela Ward.

1. **Welcome from the chair.** – Kay chaired the meeting as Deborah attended via Zoom due to illness.

Ruby's wants to remain on the distribution list but can't attend meetings or play an active part in the focus group.

2. **Notes** of the meeting of 23rd January accepted as a correct record.

3. **Actions from previous minutes**

- **Action** - Kay and Theresa to check out routes from Able World to Readsmore Surgery – **carry forward**
- **Action** – Dropped kerbs – Denis continuing to review dropped kerbs around the town centre. Footpath Morrisons no dropped kerb - Kay added to the action plan. Deborah to look at the route from an area where there is a high population of disabled residents into town/Tesco when the weather improves. **(Ongoing)**
- **Action** - Cathy & Kay are working on an accessibility leaflet for shops with Deborah's input – **Update below**
- **Action** - list of articles for the Chronicle – Kay has written to the Chronicle and suggested a regular feature (Accessibility Corner). The Chronicle has agreed to a regular feature, Kay will continue to send in articles.
- **Action** – Cathy/Debbie design a social media campaign on improving attitudes to disabilities, and highlight it before big events. "Be Kind" or "Accessibility Benefits Everyone" campaign. **(Ongoing)**
- **Action** – ask Celeste to design business posters (use disability welcome logo) be kind/accessibility welcome. Deborah to send over a document – which includes good visuals for shops to use.
- **Action** – Cathy to follow up with Mark (Town Hall Manager) regarding the ramp and accessible toilet sign.
 - **Update** - Maximum slope should be 1:12 gradient to be ADA compliant. E.g. If the drop between the 2 levels was a maximum of 30 inches, the slope would need to be 30 feet long. We have a drop of 26 inches but only 19 feet before the

end of the building where Chris Hamriding parks their vehicles. This means the slope would be greater than 1:12. To negate the slope we could add a landing and turn to the slope, however, as each slope needs to be 36 inches wide, we would completely take over the pavement next to the loading bay. I'll contact someone to measure up and provide a quote as there may be another option.

- **Action** – Email highways to reinstate the accessible parking space which should be the first space next to keep the clear area at the back of the TH but it's faded, should be blue badge holders only but anyone is parking in the space.
- **Action** – Cathy to research the best e-learning and disability-positive training for staff and councillors. **(Carry forward)**
- **Action** - Create a web page for business information to expand on the leaflet. Signpost to training, equipment such as ramps/handles etc Grant/Funding information. **(Completed)** Cathy & Kay completed the business information to start the page.
- **Action** – Cathy/Kay/Deborah to draw up terms of reference so members and potential new members understand and align with the purpose of the group. – **(Completed)** The updated terms of reference document was completed and sent to the group on the 12th of February. No further feedback was received. All agreed to vote on accepting the Terms of Reference for the group.

[View the Terms of Reference 08.04.25](#)

- **Action** – CTC should attend Your Futures event for young people, specifically those with disabilities/ Special Needs in Cheshire East (26th February). The Careers Fair at the Town Hall was held on the 2nd of April. **(Completed)** Kay attended the Your Futures Event and CTC had a stand at the Careers Fair on the 2nd of April. Kay commented that both events were well attended, very inspiring and great to see so many committed businesses.

4. Changes to Disability Benefits

In the spring statement, the government announced changes to disability benefits, this is causing a lot of concern, some members of the group are unclear on how the proposed changes will affect them which suggests the government hasn't gone far enough in communicating the changes. Changes detailed in the following article:

[Spring Statement 2025 health and disability benefit reforms – Impacts](#)

It's extremely disappointing to see the media pushing such a negative narrative, PIP is for both working and non-working people with disabilities. Just because an individual isn't in paid work doesn't mean they are not contributing to society. (Volunteering, Caregiving, Parenting etc).

Deborah knows some people who are feeling suicidal by all the uncertainty, disabled people feel let down by broken promises from the government.

Locally you can see deteriorating attitudes towards disabled people in the comments in Facebook groups.

There are various other barriers to people getting back into work, the government (and we as a town) need to dismantle these barriers. The government has pledged 4 million pounds; at the moment most people are waiting to see how the changes will affect them personally.

It's disappointing that the media is not focusing on the positive aspects of employing people with disabilities, which was the overall message from the careers fair held in April.

Action – Kay to write an article for 'Disability Corner' in the Chronicle on negative attitudes and the positive messaging from the careers fair.

Action – Contact CAB to see if they will come to Congleton so people can have face-to-face contact.

5. Disability Welcome Scheme

Disability Welcome leaflets were delivered to Town Centre businesses (apart from Mill Street/Swan Bank) and West Heath shopping areas.

The positive response from businesses with 9 leaflets returned so far. Press releases and articles in Bear Necessities will further promote the scheme.

The leaflet can be downloaded from the website: <https://www.congleton-tc.gov.uk/business-support-development/disability-welcome-congleton>

Silk Radio picked up the press release – [Congleton Town Council Disability Welcome Scheme Launched.](#)

Action – Cathy/Kay to go through the leaflets that have been returned and make the awards for Gold and Silver.

6. Vision for Transport: live consultation (Cheshire East)

Work is underway to update the Cheshire East Local Transport Plan(LTP). (Between Monday 24 February and Monday 21 April 2025).

The LTP will set the context for future investment plans and prioritise within budget constraints. Once the vision, aims and priorities have been defined, the next stage of work is to develop the LTP strategy later in 2025.

View the document - [Cheshire East's Vision for Transport Consultation brochure.](#)

Kay attended the Integrated Transport Working Group earlier in the day, they pointed out that it does not mention the Highway Code Hierarchy of road users, the group agreed most vulnerable road users should be considered first.

20 mph speed limit is not mentioned

The word 'accessible' doesn't seem to appear often.

All Cheshire East departments need to have joined up thinking around transport i.e. highways, planning, social care etc

Cheshire East Contracts should follow the principles in the Equality Act 2010, for example awarding bus contracts. Wheelchair-accessible taxis are lacking in Congleton, is this something that can be enforced through licensing or incentivised through the council?

Deborah commented that the vision didn't go far enough to recognise the needs of the individual. Semi-rural towns have problems with pavements, camber, uneven road services etc Wheelchair users 'can't just get on with it'. There is a whole raft of people in our community who can't get where they want to go because of physical barriers.

There is a lack of understanding of the challenges faced by disabled people, they must consult with more disabled people to develop an inclusive plan for all.

No vision for the reduction in traffic.

Action – Feedback comments to CTC so they can be included in the official response.

AOB.

Barriers are now removed on Biddulph Valley Way, congratulations to the sustainable travel group.

The meeting ended at 12:30 pm

Future Meeting Dates:

Tuesdays 11 am - 17th June / 9th September / 18th November

Calendar invites sent.